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Europe's role for recovery

Andrew Adonis

Saturday is Europe Day. It is especially sombre this year, 75 years since the defeat of Hitler's barbarism and 150 years since the birth of Lenin which led to the communist totalitarianism engulfing half of Europe for more than four decades after VE Day in May 1945.

Europe's challenges today are in many ways as great as 1945 and 1989. The European Union remains indispensable and Boris Johnson's intention to crash out looks worse with each passing week.

For more than anything, the coronavirus pandemic exposes the existential threat to our whole way of life of Xi's China, Putin's Russia and Trump's America.

Europe's health, trade, democracy and security are all at stake. The EU will be central to Europe's recovery and international clout once the lockdown is lifted, country by country.

Today's pandemic is nowhere near as bad as the evils inflicted on our parents and grandparents by fascism and communism. But it has been made far worse, and may even have been caused as a global phenomenon, by the lack of democracy and human rights in China, fanned by other authoritarian regimes, including Iran, which failed to act openly or transparently.

The Xi regime's litany of dissembling, victimisation of whistle-blowers and suppression of evidence about the origin and spread of Covid-19 mirrors the regime's handling of the SARS outbreak 20 years ago.

To counter this new and dangerous Chinese superpower we need a stronger, more united Europe, not a descent into weak, uncoordinated nation states with no collective capacity to act. It is not just pandemics. Europe is not safe if Xi, Putin or Trump are the arbiters of the globe. We could see this soon again in the international action needed to tackle climate change, making even Covid-19 pale into the shadows.

Those who criticise the EU for not having done more in this crisis miss the point entirely. With our societies reduced to bare essentials by the lockdown, and travel and trade largely eliminated in the quest for sheer survival, EU and virtually all international collaboration have been eclipsed. But we are going through this pain in order to get back to travel, prosperity and a full democratic civilisation, not in order to enter a new dark age of autarky, austerity and authoritarianism.

Maybe even Nigel Farage has seen the light. He is protesting that the men in blue reminded him of the emergency law on 'necessary travel only' after his trip to Dover to protest at illegal immigration. Freedom of movement suddenly matters to the King of Brexit.

Peering into a world without international trade, travel and exchange, we should be lauding the European Union and its principles of democracy and broadly-based prosperity, advanced by competent democratic governments promoting freedom of trade and freedom of movement.

European solidarity and dynamism will be critical to getting out of the economic slump now certain to follow the lockdown. The Eurozone has taken vital first steps towards a European Marshall Plan in the European Central Bank's decision to buy unlimited amounts of the debt of beleaguered member states, including Italy.

> **"European solidarity and dynamism will be critical to getting out of the economic slump**

In due course this will oblige a Eurozone arrangement on debt repayment and write-off, possibly including a larger European budget to make loans and grants to underpin recovery.

Equally vital will be EU action to revive European and international travel and trade, and to negotiate a health and safety regime with China, the US and the World Health Organisation. Britain will need to be part of this for our own prosperity and security. The only question is whether Johnson engages alongside the EU or ends up following what is already decided or negotiated by the EU while claiming to be Robinson Crusoe.

It is striking that almost every other European state appears to have handled the Covid-19 crisis better than Britain. We were behind France and Germany in the lockdown and look set to be so too in the opening up. Our fatalities have also been greater. Brexit hubris is rapidly turning to nemesis.

Edmund Burke, the greatest of Tory thinkers, described government as "a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants". More Europe, not less, is the wisdom of the future.

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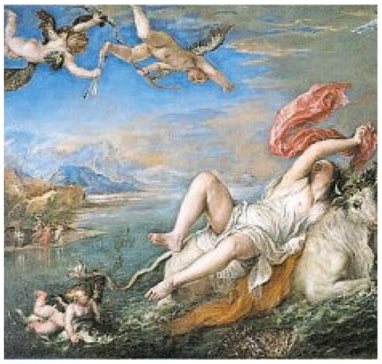

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Trump's corona culture war in which we all lose

JAMES BALL'S DECONSTRUCTED

It is impossible not to wonder, when you read about or watch a documentary on certain periods of history, whether the people of the time knew what was coming.

Given how clear warnings signs look with hindsight, did people living in the last days of Rome know the end was approaching, even if not its exact timing? Or did it feel current events were just similar tumults to the sorts they'd got through time and again before?

That wondering feels all the more pressing when you look at the way the president of the United States – a role which until very recently was regularly and unironically referred to as the leader of the free world – is handling the largest global catastrophe in his lifetime.

It becomes impossible not to wonder whether we are experiencing a tumult which we can come through, or whether this is one of those periods when things fall apart – first slowly, and then all at once.

Coronavirus itself would bring challenges enough. For years, epidemiologists have worried about and tried to plan for a deadly new flu pandemic – only to be faced with a coronavirus instead, and one which in many ways has behaved well beyond their worst-case scenarios.

It is far deadlier than any standard flus. It requires far longer in intensive care for those severely affected. We still don't know the full extent of the damage it does to the body. And, just as much of the damage to our bodies from a virus comes from the necessary immune response it provokes, so it is with our societies: locking down our economies while cases are peaking is a necessary step to prevent tens or hundreds of thousands of deaths – but it's a step that comes at the price of millions of jobs and billions of dollars.

Such extraordinary challenges demand extraordinary leadership, particularly in the world's leading nations. Yet we have learned from the first term of Donald Trump's presidency not to expect too much.

Trump is not, as some have claimed, a cynical genius playing 4D chess with the media, his apparent outbursts part of a Machiavellian game. He is not what he promised to be to his supporters, a blowhard billionaire out to do his best for 'real' America.

He is a much simpler creature than any of those caricatures.

He is a thin-skinned narcissist out for himself, buoyed up by a Republican party happy to support anyone with a pulse if it helps them secure huge tax cuts for the rich.

Since arriving in the White House in 2017, the best prospect for Trump's ego and his re-election – definitely his top priorities – has been to ride out the dual wave of the economic prosperity he inherited (and which had not yet fallen apart under his mismanagement) and the culture war he had so rapidly escalated from the bully pulpit.

The historical stats were certainly in his favour. Even unpopular presidents tend to win a second term, if they run for it.

As we came into election year proper, the tactic was on course to work: most early models and punditry suggested Trump would win a second term in November.

And then came coronavirus, and with its arrival Trump's fragile strategy began to crumble.

The president's initial response to the crisis has been as chaotic and incompetent as we have come to expect.

He first tried ignoring coronavirus, then blaming China for it, then announcing token measures and praising himself for them, before moving onto making the pandemic about himself, and then promoting totally unevidenced and potentially harmful miracle cures.

The problem with a pandemic is that none of Trump's usual tempter-tantrum tactics have much effect. Viruses aren't much impressed by bluster and can't be dissuaded by press conferences. And no amount of showboating will stop people noticing if their loved ones are getting sick and dying.

Once coronavirus moved in on what Trump really cared about – himself and his re-election prospects – by damaging the US economy, he got bored and urgently wanted to move on. His plan to do that? To see if ignoring it will make it go away.

In place of a reasoned, practical strategy to help his country cope with this deadly virus, the president has instead resolved to wage a culture war with it, involving all the usual suspects, the media, China, the Dems.

RECKLESS RESPONSE: Donald Trump speaks with Fox News anchors Bret Baier and Martha MacCallum during a virtual town hall at Washington's Lincoln Memorial on May 3

Photo: Getty Images

Having raged about the precise source of the virus, his coverage in the press and criticism from his political opponents, he is now playing a reckless game over plans to reopen America, either tacitly or overtly egging on supporters who want this to happen far faster than the scientific experts advise.

The governor of Georgia may have got a slap on the wrist from Trump for reopening too early (while it was still polling badly even with Trump voters), but elsewhere America is reopening – or facing huge protests to reopen – even as cases rise.

The movement starts stupid and gets scary quickly. Emergency workers find themselves unable to get to emergencies as streets are clogged with protestors demanding governors reopen crowded workplaces.

People pack out beaches and town squares with no facial coverings. And armed militias rush statehouses – and are allowed to do so, taking selfies on public property with their automated weapons.

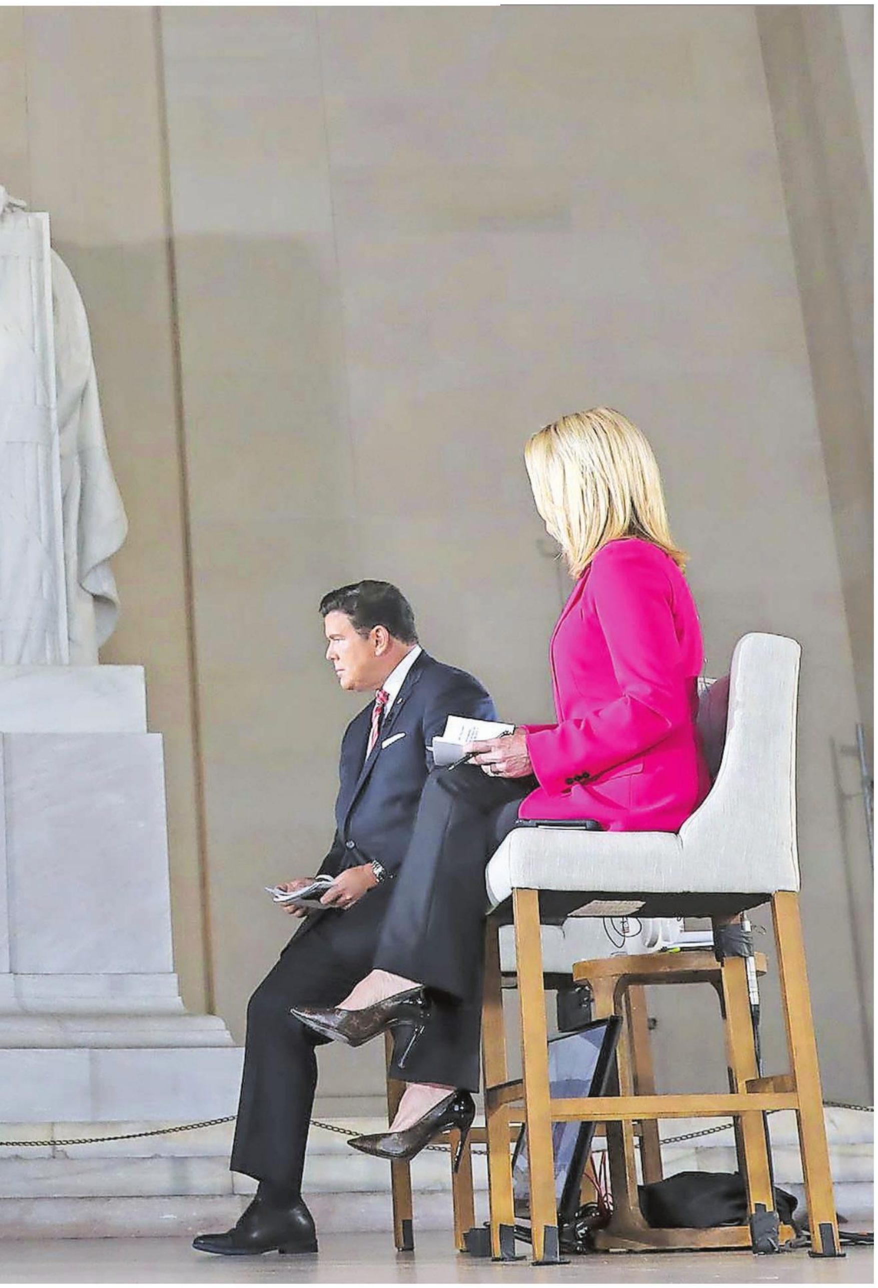
As the centre falls apart, states are left to fend for themselves for supplies, for help on how to manage their economy, and to manage their millions of new unemployed – who have nothing like the federal government support they need to survive.

Republican governments are generally looking at how the political winds are blowing and are following the president's lead: looking for ways to reopen, and fuelling the culture war.

Their Democratic counterparts meanwhile are teaming up – united states, so to speak – trying to find a way to weather the storm. The very structure of the US is crumbling.

Needless to say, this will kill people. It will lead to tens if not hundreds of thousands of entirely preventable coronavirus deaths, and it will lead to terrible consequences for millions of others as it jerks the economy open and shut on the whims of a billionaire, rather than based on expert consensus.

It will kill people more directly still: just this week a security guard at a Family Dollar store in Michigan was shot dead for attempting to enforce a state-mandated rule requiring customers to



wear face coverings. He is unlikely to be the last such death.

Trump will not care about any of this if his new, desperation strategy works. His tactic, it seems, is to recognise that if you're losing a game – and as the US economy collapsed, his polling numbers versus Democratic nominee Joe Biden went from tricky into death-spiral category – you have nothing to lose by flipping the table.

Trump's hope is that he can bring his base back onside by trying to turn coronavirus into an issue like any other, something to divide the "libs" and the "Washington elite" from "real America" – and that if that happens, the Republican establishment, its PACs – political action committees – and friendly TV channels will do enough to mobilise paralysed voters in the middle in his direction.

It is desperate, it is deadly, and it is divisive, but it might work for Trump.

It comes at the cost of the USA's response to coronavirus, and that will exert a toll on the rest of the world.

Good international coordination can avert disaster. Getting it wrong can escalate a disaster into a cataclysm – as was seen in the Great Depression in the early 1930s.

Most of this damage is done even if Trump loses – and goes gracefully – in the autumn. Even without him, multilateralism isn't coming back any time soon. China will still need careful management, and a damaged relationship will need rebuilding. America will be fractured, quite possibly for generations. And no-one who has died thanks to presidential neglect will ever come back. And all of that is in the very best case scenario we face. It could easily be much worse, if his gamble succeeds.

Coronavirus has escalated Trump's breaking down of everything that holds America together, metastasising it into something even more toxic and even more deadly.

Could it survive another four years of this? Can the world pull back from this blip? Or will people in a few hundred years' time read about the 2020s and wonder what it felt to live in that period, just before the fall?

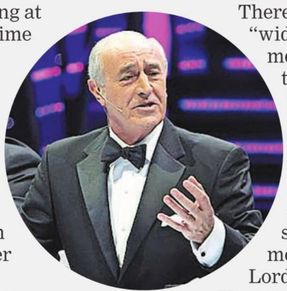
Mandrake

Tim Walker

mandrake@theneweuropean.co.uk @thattimwalker

Strictly friendship for Len and Fred

As his dispiriting legal battle with his twin brother **Sir David** resumed online in the High Court this week, **Sir Frederick Barclay**, the co-owner of the *Daily Telegraph*, can take solace in at least one enduring, if unlikely, bond in his life. Cha-cha-cha forward, **Len Goodman**, of *Strictly Come Dancing* fame.



"When Len started dancing at the age of 19, after a short time as an apprentice welder for Harland and Wolff, Fred bought him his first ballroom dancing suit and it was magnificent," a friend of Sir Frederick tells Mandrake. "Len never forgot that and they have been going to ballroom dancing events together ever since. Fred has two great pleasures in life – his ballroom dancing and his daily cigar."

Sir David has cultivated friendships with newspapermen such as **Geordie Greig**, **Paul Dacre** and **David Leigh**, but his twin has never fretted about his public image and a lot less is known about him. There were rumours a few years ago that Sir Frederick, 85, was gravely ill, but these were unfounded. In addition to Goodman, *pictured*, the **Queen** and the **Prince of Wales** – regular patrons of the Ritz – are understood to have a soft spot for the old boy.

The privacy case that Sir Frederick and his daughter **Amanda** are bringing against Sir David and his sons **Alistair**, **Aidan** and **Howard** – as well as Aidan's son **Andrew** – involves allegations of their conversations being bugged in the conservatory of the Ritz. Sir David participated in this week's online proceedings from the family's castle on Brecqhou, whereas Sir Frederick did so from his somewhat less ostentatious London residence.

The dispute is proving problematical for the establishment with **Boris Johnson** having to go out of his way to show he's not siding with either twin, given the newspaper they jointly own had, until he became prime minister, being paying him £270,000 a year. A peerage that had been rumoured to be in the offing for Aidan Barclay – Sir David's son, who presides over the newspaper – is said to be on hold until the case is decided. Proceedings are expected to resume in the High Court in November.

Fightback

It's undoubtedly convenient for "officials" in Boris Johnson's government to say that the coronavirus is making it impractical for the House of Lords – where the average age is 70 – to meet in full until sometime next year. The Brextremists have neither forgotten nor forgiven the Lords – any more than the judges of the Supreme Court – for asserting their independence at various points over the past few years.

There's ominous talk, too, of "wider reforms" – not to mention booting them all off to York – once things settle down, but pleasingly there's resistance, not least from the women of the Upper House. **Baroness Hussein-Ece**, a sprightly 64 with a life story that defies every media stereotype about the Lords, points out that **Matt Hancock** has said there should be no "blanket ban" on the over-70s working. "Take away the checks and balances we have in our constitution and we become a dictatorship," she warns.

Baby talk

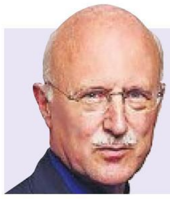
The abuse that greets **David Cameron**'s tweets mean that he now says very little on the social networking website. When he got around to congratulating Boris Johnson and **Carrie Symonds** on the birth of their baby **Wilfred** last week, he apologised for not leaving behind the cot in the Downing Street flat. "I'm surprised you didn't leave the kid," one funster riposted.

Speechless

Theresa May has found a way to make money out of public speaking without actually speaking. This may well come as a relief to anyone who remembers her performance at the 2017 Tory conference.

The former PM, *pictured*, has just disclosed that J P Morgan paid her £160,000 for two speaking engagements that had to be cancelled last month as a result of lockdown. If there are any gluttons for punishment, May has assured the bank she's still willing to make her speeches when it's safe to do so. She's managed to make more than £1 million since being ousted from Downing Street, which is good news for her employees and favoured charities.

Far from our finest hour



MICHAEL WHITE

A LEADERLESS WORLD IS PROVING TO BE ILL-EQUIPPED FOR CRISIS AT HAND

The writer, Michael Morpurgo, wrote a poignant article at the weekend to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day. Amid second-hand reminiscence (he was just 18 months old at the time) the author of *War Horse* wondered how lessons from the end of a vastly greater trauma than the Covid-19 pandemic might help us shape the better future we want to create now that a return to 'normalcy' looks like a receding option.

May 8, 1945, was a day of celebration, but one mixed with exhausted relief and much sadness for the 450,000 British dead – up to 80 million worldwide – wrote Morpurgo. As a result people better understood what really mattered and that the individual is diminished and vulnerable without the mutual succour provided by a thriving community. I suppose that's what we acknowledge when we clap health and care staff on Thursdays at 8pm. The NHS itself is the most cherished legacy of post-war reconstruction.

Splendid stuff and we can all see how we might now decide to savour more deeply the simple things we've missed: freedom of movement to the hills and beaches, socialising with friends and family, sport and the theatre, church and pub, even the camaraderie of the workplace now denied to most of us since late March. Will we drive less and walk more? Fly fewer air miles and clock up more on a bike? Will we cut back on pointless Amazon purchases (a third are never used) and give up unhealthy takeaways now that we've learned to cook again?

I know, I know. Many such good intentions may be as short-lived as the promised 'land fit for heroes' proved to be after 1918. Britain's backward gaze at war-time heroism has often been a source of misplaced exceptionalism and nostalgic complacency. But let's not mention the B-word yet, not when most of us are doing quite well being more civil to each other than we were.

Not all the time, of course. On Wednesday we saw the *Daily Telegraph* do over professor Neil Ferguson, Imperial College's high profile, hyper-energetic epidemiologist, for taking visits from his activist lover in breach of 'stay at home' guidelines. A fair cop, guv'nor because "do as I say, not as I do" is rarely a good look. So Ferguson quit, this just 24 hours after the *Mail* "exposed" ex-chief scientific adviser, Sir David King's rival Covid committee as a bunch of leftie scientists. Play nicer. Boys!

★★★★★★★★★★

It all comes at a time when the government's own scientists are starting to admit error, hard to deny as known UK Covid deaths outstrip Italy's on a higher curve. Oh yes, and Priti ('Take Back Control") Patel's officials confessed that 18 million visitors entered the UK without checks (just 273 required to self-isolate) in the eight weeks before the March 23 lockdown. I detect scapegoating in Whitehall and Fleet St as tired nerves fray. Who tipped off the *Telegraph* with this useful distraction from the death count?

As Downing St gingerly edges the country towards some limited version of a functioning economy – "next stage" not "exit strategy," please – how ironical that most voters have proved more lockdown-compliant than the prof. Less eager than fearful of returning to workplace and classroom, less freedom-loving Merrie Englanders than You-Know-Who imagined, eh.

★★★★★★★★★★

I didn't hear anyone complaining about Boris's Project Fear, but, if No.10 and the boffins belatedly overdid the frighteners, it was for a worthy cause. It remains to be seen whether the government's boost in the polls – and revived levels of wholesome trust – survive the arrival of the hefty bill for furloughing 6.3 million people and bailing out their bosses. Polls rightly give Team Johnson poor ratings for pandemic preparation and speed of response. Voters may duly exact retribution when the danger is past as they did to the VE Day hero at the July 5 election. Solid Keir Starmer as an unflappable Clem Attlee, a calmer Yin to Boris's restless Yang, it's a thought. "National consensus" is Sir Keir's less-than-snappy slogan this week.

★★★★★★★★★★

Either way we are changed by such a strange experience as the lockdown, one which we – and billions around the world – have all shared, like watching a global soap opera together. How often does that happen? It serves to underline how adaptable and resilient people can be in the face of change unless it overwhelms them, as disaster occasionally does to Minoans, Mayans and Mexican Aztecs.

So the biggest positive opportunity the Covid shake-up offers us is to see how we really could adapt our high-consumption lifestyle to something less voracious. It might keep two degree global warming at bay and save seven million lives a year from death by air pollution alone. You don't need a satellite photo over Wuhan or Lombardy to see what a beneficial environmental impact a lockdown can have. But when we shift from touchy-feely generalisations to specifics we start to realise how hard such change might prove.

'Degrowth' advocates want global society not simply to end the race for perpetual economic growth – it's only a means to an end, often self-defeating – but to reverse it. In Europe we may bask in our commitment to a post-fossil fuel economy by 2050 (does lockdown show it can be done?) while sneakily offshoring our industrial pollution to East Asia. Even in Lombardy – or Liverpool – closed factories and cleaner air equals lost jobs and income for many, on top of those already lost to globalisation and tech. So does oil at $1 a barrel, especially when it remains £1.25 a gallon at the pump.

> **"Polls rightly give Team Johnson poor ratings for pandemic preparation and speed of response. Voters may duly exact retribution when the danger is past as they did to the VE Day hero at the July 5 election. Solid Keir Starmer as an unflappable Clem Attlee, it's a thought**

So, while the pandemic experience unites us in shared grief and disruption, alongside hopes for a brighter future in return for the suffering, it also divides us – brutally so. Every week brings fresh evidence of this. As Britain gets a better grip on its Covid-19 related excess deaths – in the community and care homes, as well as hospitals – new data highlights the plight of the north east and north west, infection rates higher per capita than the crowded global hub that is London.

New York, Detroit, New Orleans, many of their neighbourhoods chaotic and poor, stand in stark contrast to well-ordered Seattle, Seoul and Berlin. The basic competence of governing regimes, and public trust which that generates, are a clear determinant everywhere. But so are age, sex, genetic ethnicity, occupational status and class, inter-generational cultural practices, including crowded places of worship and quack doctors peddling 'Covid cures' in bishops' garb.

Lifestyle habits that help trigger those ominous 'underlying conditions' are not confined to smoking habits and – this week's new focus – obesity. Expensive ski resorts from Aspen to Austria have also been super-spreaders. Cornish explorer, Robin Hanbury-Tenison, who emerged safely from a Covid-19 ordeal this week, had just been ski-ing (at 83).

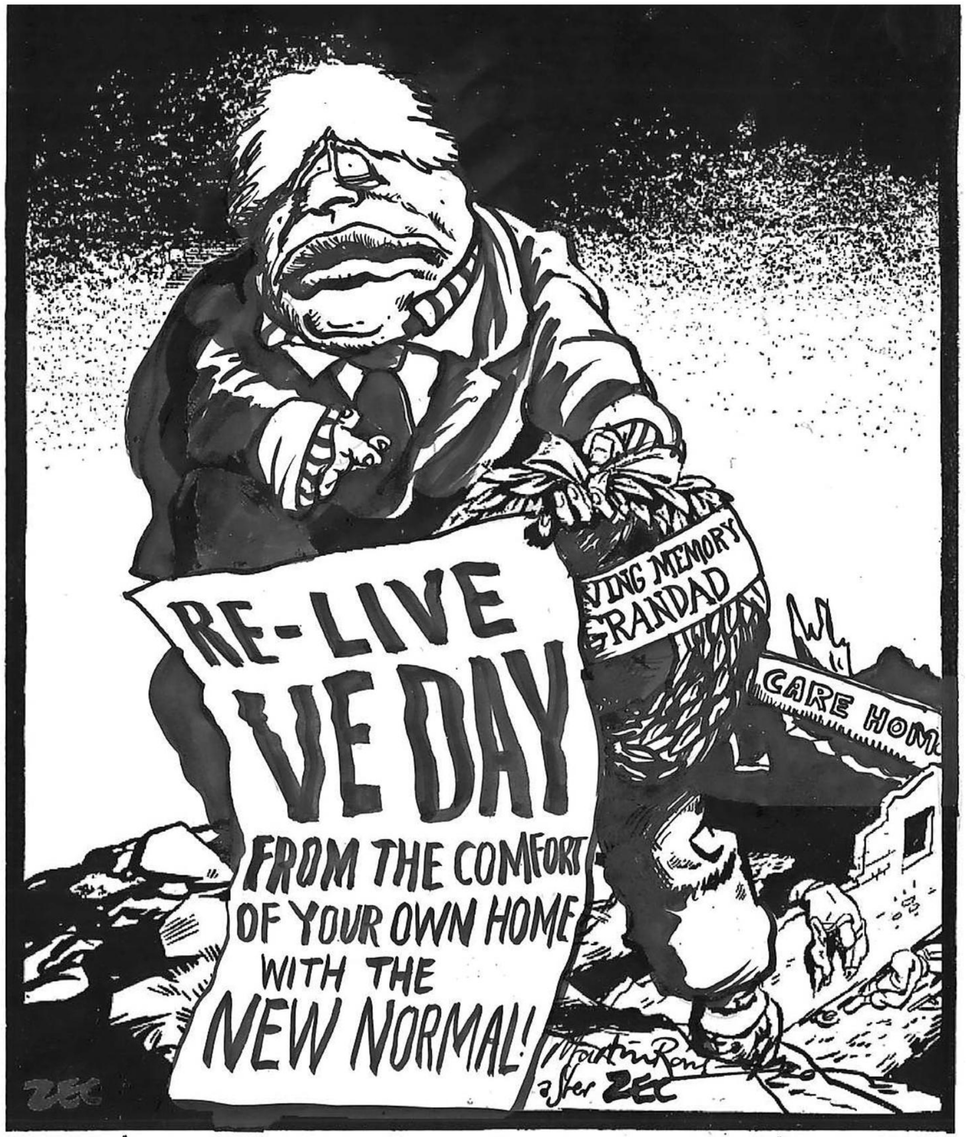
Rarely has Don Rumsfeld's wrongly-mocked "known and unknown unknowns" aphorism been more apposite. We've known for centuries that poverty always renders people more vulnerable to plague and that health workers without proper PPE are obviously going to be at risk. But did you know that more of the NHS's BAME doctors keep working longer (my excellent GP is 74) after retirement age? Or that many of those who die of Covid-19 in their 30s and 40s are found to have untreated high blood pressure?

Me neither. But science around the world – a heartening sight – works frantically to establish exactly how coronavirus functions and why X emerges from it unscathed while Y dies. Genes must be a factor. Thus mutant cystic fibrosis genes are commoner in northern Europeans (we have it in the family) because the disorder helped carriers to survive cholera epidemics. But activists cherry pick the evidence to 'prove' cultural racist bias or to demand that Boris unleash healthy over-70s along with the youngsters this week. Didn't you know that First Dad Stanley J – who shares the PM's entitlement gene – is eager to celebrate his 80th properly in August? Be patient, Stan. We first need to understand Covid to know how to contain it. NHS masks and Perspex screens, staggered commuting and those Bluetooth track-and-trace Apps being piloted on the Isle of Wight? You're not immortal, Stan. Ask your boy what it's like.

★★★★★★★★★★

But politicians, "following the science" and the opinion polls, have to balance public health prudence against mounting economic damage and terrifying levels of consequent debt – public and private. Hence all the trial balloons they have been floating ahead of Johnson's promised "next stage" statement. That Covid-19 has borne down unequally on different sections of society – its impact also divided by age, ethnicity, region and (less fashionably) sex – is now a truism which grievance pedlars eagerly exploit. The last thing the country needs is to be hit by another wave of Nigel Farage when we're still getting over the last wave.

So disharmony presents danger – medical, economic, political – at the local level, though gun-toting 'libertarian' protests ("Give me Liberty *and* give me Death") we saw outside the state legislature in Minnesota, are relatively few so far. Mr Farage seems to be on furlough. Far more serious in their long-term effect are the festering suspicions we can clearly see at global, regional – in our case, Europe and the North Atlantic – as well as national domestic level. The new nationalism could squash most hopes of collective betterment.



"O TEMPORA! O MORONS!"
~~"Here you are! Don't lose it again!"~~

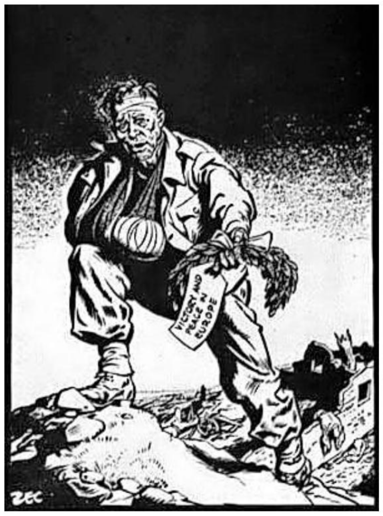
The flashing red light on the dial that monitors Sino-American relations is alarming. Think for a moment if those shots fired across Korea's demilitarised zone (DMZ) had been a deliberate provocation from the north to distract attention from Kim Jong-un's mysterious disappearance. How much do we trust a pair of insecure and autocratic bullies like presidents Xi and Trump to get on their hotline to calm things down? Do they even have one? The comparison that leaps to mind is the chaotic fallout from the assassination at Sarajevo in 1914, not the managed brinkmanship that peacefully turned round that shipment of Soviet missiles heading to Cuba in 1962.

Washington's erratic trade war with Beijing was bad enough. But China's manipulative cynicism in deflecting legitimate questions about the origins and handing of the emerging Wuhan epidemic in December begs for a firm but adroit American leadership response. Was it November anyway? French doctors have now reverse-engineered some 'flu' symptoms: Covid-19 may have been in Paris by Christmas. Unpicking the science and preventing its contamination by bad politics requires what we used to call diplomacy when Henry Kissinger – no pushover – was in his manipulative prime. Instead we have had inconsistent, often incoherent bluster from the White House. In the *Irish Times* the other day, Fintan O'Toole wrote that the US has provoked many emotions in his lifetime, but never pity – until now.

Donald Trump's falling domestic approval ratings in response to his woeful Covid crisis management ramp up the risk that a cornered rat may bite. It would be a great relief if Joe Biden's #MeToo problems proved enough to sink his own inadequate candidacy. That could clear the way for a Democratic state governor or senator 20 years younger than 77 – 30 years even – who can decisively defeat Trump and rescue the federal government machine from the ineptitude, cronyism and neglect he is deliberately inflicting on it every day.

★★★★★★★★★★

Where are the Americans hearing the call of destiny? Why have party apparatchiks put up with such mediocrity? For the same reason that serious Labour politicians put up with four wasted years


VICTORY AND PEACE IN EUROPE
ZEC

of Corbynism: cowardice in the face of irresponsible populism among their activists, the driving force behind Boris Johnson's ascent. Young Wilfred Johnson is a blameless new-born, but to see God-and-family newspapers simpering over his birth with barely a mention of its highly-irregular circumstances also tells us a lot we'd rather not know about our shabby times. Page one mother-and-baby photos sweep the debris under the rug. Very Boris. His reproduction factor is at least R.6. Neil Ferguson's foibles are less indulged.

★★★★★★★★★★

Back to the big picture where in place of diplomacy we get propaganda and power plays. China is rapidly expanding its first deep sea navy for 500 years and cash-for-complicity loans across East and South Asia towards its old trading routes to Africa and the Middle East. State agencies, sober ambassadors even, hit the airwaves and social media to peddle evasions and lies about the source and spread of Covid-19. An *FT* analysis accuses Beijing officials of doctoring footage for Chinese TV news, purporting to show Italians on their balconies cheering Chinese PPE and medical help.

With its fragile banking system, debt levels and past communist sympathies Italy is said to be China's target EU state: a *Travels of Marco Polo* in reverse. At the start of the lockdown an Italian friend assured me that Chinese tourists in Venice had brought Covid-19 to Lombardy just as Chinese sanctions-busters (he said) brought it to Tehran. On Tuesday a BBC report suggested that a Revolutionary Guard airline – there's crony capitalism for you – had systematically breached quarantine restrictions with multiple flights to China that brought the virus back. Initially, right-wing US pundits said Italy and Tehran were paying the price of dodgy dealings with China – a less vocal claim now that the US tops the Covid casualty list.

Talking of the EU, did you spot that Team Trump claims – made despite specific advice from their own agencies – that intelligence data points to Covid-19 emerging (by accident or design) from Wuhan's viral lab, not its wet markets, is supported by an unpublished British-Norwegian paper? Its co-author is retired oncologist, Professor Angus Dalgleish, a distinguished researcher but also a former UKIP candidate (Sutton and Cheam, 2015) and 'Leave means Leave' champion of Brexit.

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There is an unsettling connectivity to some of this thinking. But presidents lashing out on Twitter are more dangerous than professors. This week Trump attacked George Bush for calling for national unity. His own contribution was to attack state governors for not taking his advice or – in unlocked Georgia – taking it too literally. Divisiveness is Trump's forte, "you're fired" as he used to say hosting reality TV's *The Apprentice*. All the while he plays pass-the-blame-parcel with Xi who is likely to prove a better player, not easily fired.

The EU remains committed to unity and consensus. But there is a familiar divergence between theory and practice. The time is long past when we talked hopefully of the "hour of Europe". The eurozone's survival, not its global projection of soft power, is currently the focus of its ambition. The UK-EU's Zoom trade talks seem to be making snail's pace progress with neither side yet blinking as the June 30 deadline looms. As speculators use the uncertainty to short the pound Liz Truss, the international trade secretary, has just started talks with the US. Does she know she's entering a cage with a gorilla?

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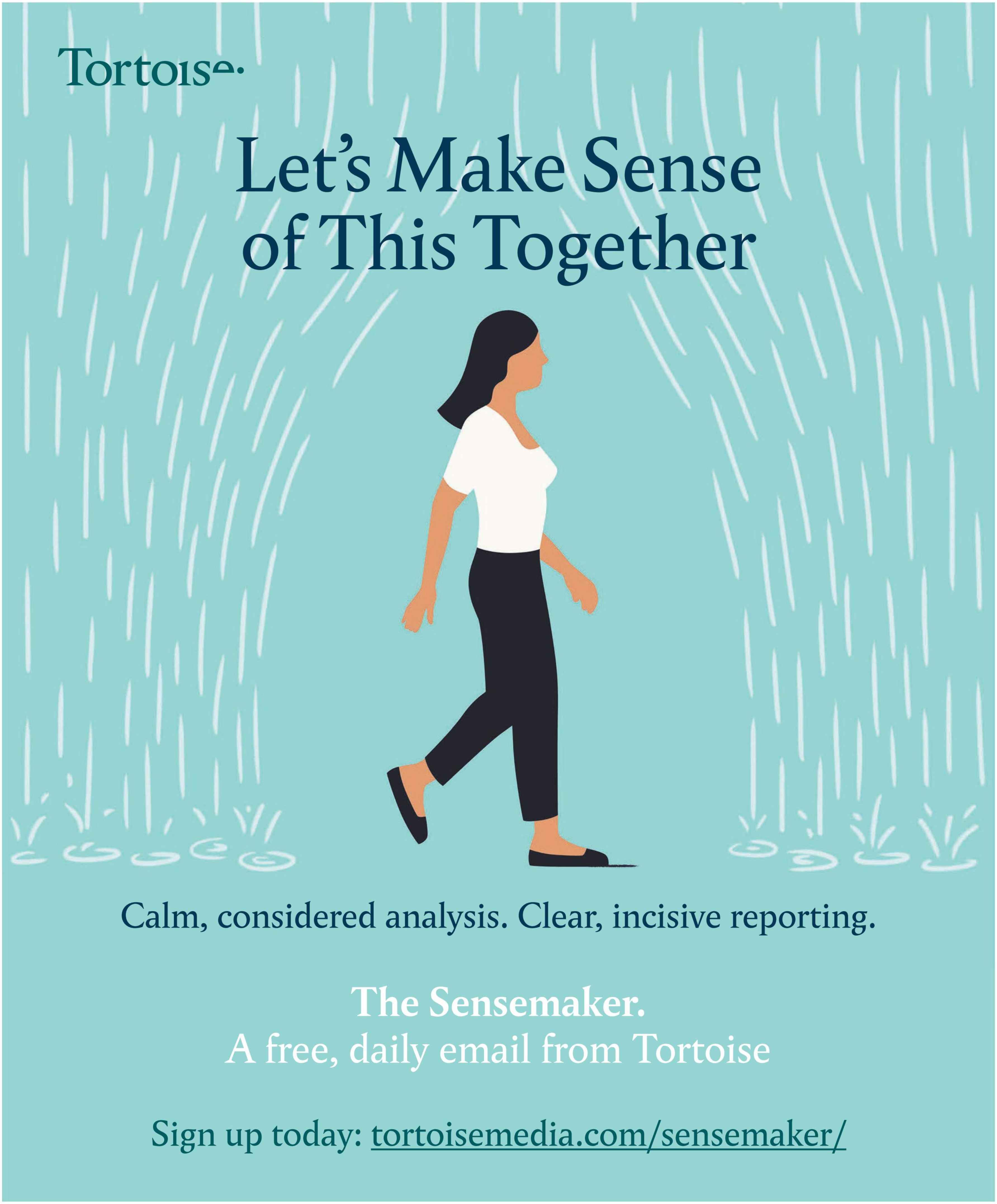
Internally the EU's North-South divide is taking new contours. The Teuton bloc remains reluctant to underwrite coronavirus debts of the struggling Latin south via some form of banking union. On Tuesday, Germany's constitutional court threatened to kybosh the ECB's bond purchasing lifeline, a bad judicial call. It has now emerged that the rich north is getting more than its share of EU state aid waivers to prop up endangered industries, Germany double its share. And Ryanair's Michael O'Leary is not alone in noticing that inefficient airlines in France, Germany and Italy are getting the nod from the Commission for what look like rule-breaking state handouts that will allow them to emerge from lockdown in better shape than more efficient British rivals who are shedding staff (and Gatwick), Where's Boris protecting our interests, you might ask?

Pro-Brexit *Times* columnist, Iain Martin, ingeniously suggests that December 31 remains a suitable moment to sever our EU chains because the pandemic hit to Europe's economies will greatly exceed the damage expected to arise from a hard Brexit. Lorry queues at Dover? Chaos at airports? You must be joking, they're currently empty. The perfect time to make the adjustment. I'd be more reassured by such market optimism if I hadn't watched dizzy New York and London stock exchanges bounce back as if a V-shaped recovery is a done deal.

With similar insouciance no less a figure than Steve Baker MP, the former Brexit minister and Leave establishment grandee, popped up this week to demand an end to the "absurd, dystopian and tyrannical" lockdown, a probably illegal action by the "surveillance state", said our Steve. Not long to wait before we know whether World King Boris still shares his lieutenant's gung-ho attitudes now that he's had coronavirus and baby Wilfred.



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Brexit must go on the backburner

While our attention is elsewhere, we are hurtling towards a catastrophic no-deal, says CAROLINE VOADEN

It's hard to believe that something which had dominated our lives for so long – Brexit – has almost completely fallen off the radar.

After the shock of the December general election, and the brutality of losing our jobs and heading home from Brussels in January, we former MEPs were geared up for the long haul of holding the government to account as it ground its way through tortuous post-Brexit trade negotiations with the EU. And when Boris Johnson spoke of "healing the rift" between Leavers and Remainers, it seemed an impossible idea.

Little did any of us think a global pandemic would sweep across the globe and make those two words almost redundant within weeks. We are now a people divided between frontline workers and those who stay at home, the vulnerable and those less at risk, the sick and the well.

But while many people have far more urgent things to concentrate on, it is vital that some of us don't take our eyes off what's happening with Brexit. The transition clock is ticking loudly and it's only a few weeks until the UK has to decide whether it will ask for an extension to the transition period that is due to end on December 31.

Senior Europeans say that while the case for an extension is overwhelming, there is little appetite for it on the UK side. And while the government might be tempted to use Covid-19 to camouflage the disaster of a crash out from the single market and customs union at the end of the year, the costs will be high – and less affordable than ever.

This government, picked for its adherence to the Brexit mantra rather than its ability to steer us out of the Covid-19 crisis, still seems hell bent on crashing out, rather than looking at the changed landscape we now find ourselves in and accepting that not only we, but other governments too, have other things to think about.

We are so far away from reaching an agreement with the EU that it is fantasy to assume it is now possible. The timeline was extremely tight to begin with, but after talks stalled due to illness and isolation, the prospect of a deal has become even less likely.

And the UK's refusal to make their negotiating mandate public is infuriating EU capitals. They don't even know what the UK side is aiming for.

"The problems are immense: the British texts, which are not made public, don't cover a number of key priorities," says one senior European who is well aware of what's happening in the negotiations. "Nothing substantial on a level playing field, no text whatsoever on fisheries so far, no recognition of the role of ECJ or ECHR, no commitments regarding climate change, no certainty in the protection of data… The political declaration is forgotten."

The source said there was nothing concrete so far on how the UK sees its relationship with EU security or defence policies but by contrast they are making huge demands about access to European data, with no strings attached.

"More generally, there is an aggressive tone which hurts and doesn't help. There are many reasons why the talks are only talks, and not proper negotiations. The risk of a no-deal is serious and obviously a scenario which has some traction in London."

During a remote meeting of the UK-EU Friendship Group set up by MEPs before the UK contingent headed home, Polish MEP Radek Sikorski (European People's Party) said: "We should all prepare ourselves for a super hard Brexit at the end of this year."

And French MEP Nathalie Loiseau (Renew Europe), said: "The pace of negotiations is pretty slow. There's very little progress. We ask for no posturing ideology, but for care for individuals and businesses who will be affected by this."

The feeling in Brussels is that the UK still wants an agreement with all the benefits, but with minimal obligations. Their language is couched in ideology and hubris. Never mind the details of what being a 'third country' means in reality, fulfilling an election promise still seems far more important – regardless of the fact that whole world order has fundamentally changed.

A quarter of UK businesses have temporarily closed their doors because of the coronavirus pandemic and the government is paying the wages of one in five workers. Smaller companies, family businesses, the self-employed are feeling the pain hardest.

Budget forecasters say Britain's economy could shrink by 13% this year, its deepest recession in three centuries, and public borrowing is set to surge to a post-Second World War high. The budget deficit could hit £273 billion – five times its previous estimate and equivalent to 14% of GDP. For comparison, it hit 10% after the global financial crisis and had been gradually reduced to around 2% after a decade of austerity spending.

So we're facing a budget deficit way higher than we saw in 2008, at a time when the country needs anything but more austerity spending.

The results of this policy have been laid bare for all to see during the pandemic – from nursing shortages to a lack of basic equipment in the NHS, and the shambolic state of our social care system, which no politician has been brave enough to address.

Things will be bad enough by December. To add the economic shock of a no-deal Brexit to this would be madness. And incomprehensible that any government would wish that combination on itself, let alone its citizens.

UK businesses will need every avenue open to them to have a hope of surviving the shock. But with no willingness on the UK side to agree to a level playing field on social and environmental concerns, and the difficult issue of fishing, it looks unlikely that the EU will be granting us access to its single market.

There is no free trade deal in the world that replaces membership of the single market and customs union – the most advanced trading models ever created. And no government has the time or resources at the moment to create something similar for a country that has become the first and only in the world to want a new trade agreement that gives it less access than it already had.

As Best for Britain, the campaign organisation, says: "It's not reasonable to expect the UK to replace all our existing trading relationships during a global lockdown – nor is it fair to expect other nations to prioritise negotiations with us. We need the entire world focused on controlling Covid-19 and dealing with the fallout.

The totemic industry during the Brexit campaign was fishing. And it's raising its head again. "The EU negotiators are clearly linking fishing to access to the EU market. No agreement on fishing, then no preferential access to the single market. So far, the UK has withheld its legal text on fisheries and this is causing serious frustration on the EU side," said another EU source.

The UK fishing industry has been all but grounded, not helped by the shutdown of the entire hotel and restaurant market. How long before that picks up? And as the industry creaks back into life can it really face the prospect of having access to its European markets removed? Don't forget, 60% of the fish we catch in the UK is destined for European markets.

Another sector that is in a desperate situation is freight transport – nearly a quarter of UK logistics companies face potential collapse in the next few weeks. In other circumstances it would be frantically preparing for the December deadline, but the industry is wrestling with Covid-19 instead.

"There is simply not enough capacity available to plan the major structural changes needed to implement a successful departure from the EU, as well as… dealing with unprecedented pressures caused by Covid-19," said Elizabeth de Jong, policy director at the Freight Transport Association. "Our industry needs the support of government, not to be broken by it."

Sometimes things just don't go according to plan. To be fair to the Conservatives, and to Boris Johnson's government, they weren't expecting a global pandemic when they fought the election on a Brexit platform. But things have changed and 64% of the British people now believe it's right to ask for an extension to the Brexit transition period, given the circumstances we find ourselves in (even one in five Brexit Party voters agreed). It's time for a rethink at No.10.

■ Caroline Voaden is a former Liberal Democrat leader in the European parliament and the party's special advisor on European relations

SHIFTING PRIORITIES: The prime minister's Europe adviser David Frost, left, and EU chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier, right

Photos: Getty Images

This should be our 1945 moment..

1945: Jubilant nurses celebrate VE Day in Liverpool on May 8

Photo: Getty Images

A watershed moment is approaching for Britain, says FRANCIS BECKETT. Alas, it looks certain to lead us the wrong way

The end of this virus emergency, whenever it comes, will be a political watershed. As Britain's most trusted historian, professor Lord Peter Hennessy, has said: "Those who write the history of Britain post-1945 will divide it into BC, Before Corona, and AC, After Corona."

It will be potentially a 1945 moment – a moment when a new world is possible. But will we get it? The realistic answer, unless Keir Starmer can do something really clever, has to be: almost certainly not.

In 1945, the people supported, and the government delivered, a fundamentally different society from the one that had existed before the war: fairer, more generous, more internationalist, more at peace with our neighbours.

The "New Jerusalem" was built on the Beveridge Report, which talked of slaying the "five giants" – want, ignorance, disease, squalor and idleness. They were slain with a National Health Service, free and compulsory education, state interventions in the economy, unemployment pay and the welfare state.

"A new Beveridge is above all what post-corona Britain needs" writes Hennessy in the Catholic magazine *The Tablet*. "Brexit wore us out – three-and-a-half scouring, souring years in which the worst characteristics of our politics were on display. The corona experience… has shown us the very best of ourselves once more."

Many of the elements that made the 1945 New Jerusalem possible exist today. The men and women who had fought the war, looked after the wounded and lost friends and family were determined not to come back to the same brutally unfair society they had known in the 1930s, with its gulf between rich and poor, its conspicuous wealth beside grinding poverty.

Today, workers in the public sector, and especially the NHS – abused and despised by successive governments ever since Margaret Thatcher's time – are dying in order that we may live.

They will not willingly remain at the bottom of the wages heap. Ministers who a few months ago were voting down pay increases for health workers, and cheering because they were able to do so, are now standing sheepishly in front of television cameras every Thursday and cheering the health workers.

The idea of the state playing a central part in our lives, controlling much of our economic activity, seemed strange, frightening and foreign in 1939. But to fight a war efficiently, any government must dictate to industry what it requires, and take to itself the power to get it, and this looked quite normal and unthreatening by 1945.

The present government – reluctantly and hesitantly – is doing the same. They cannot fight the virus without massive state intervention, any more than the Churchill government could fight the Nazis without it.

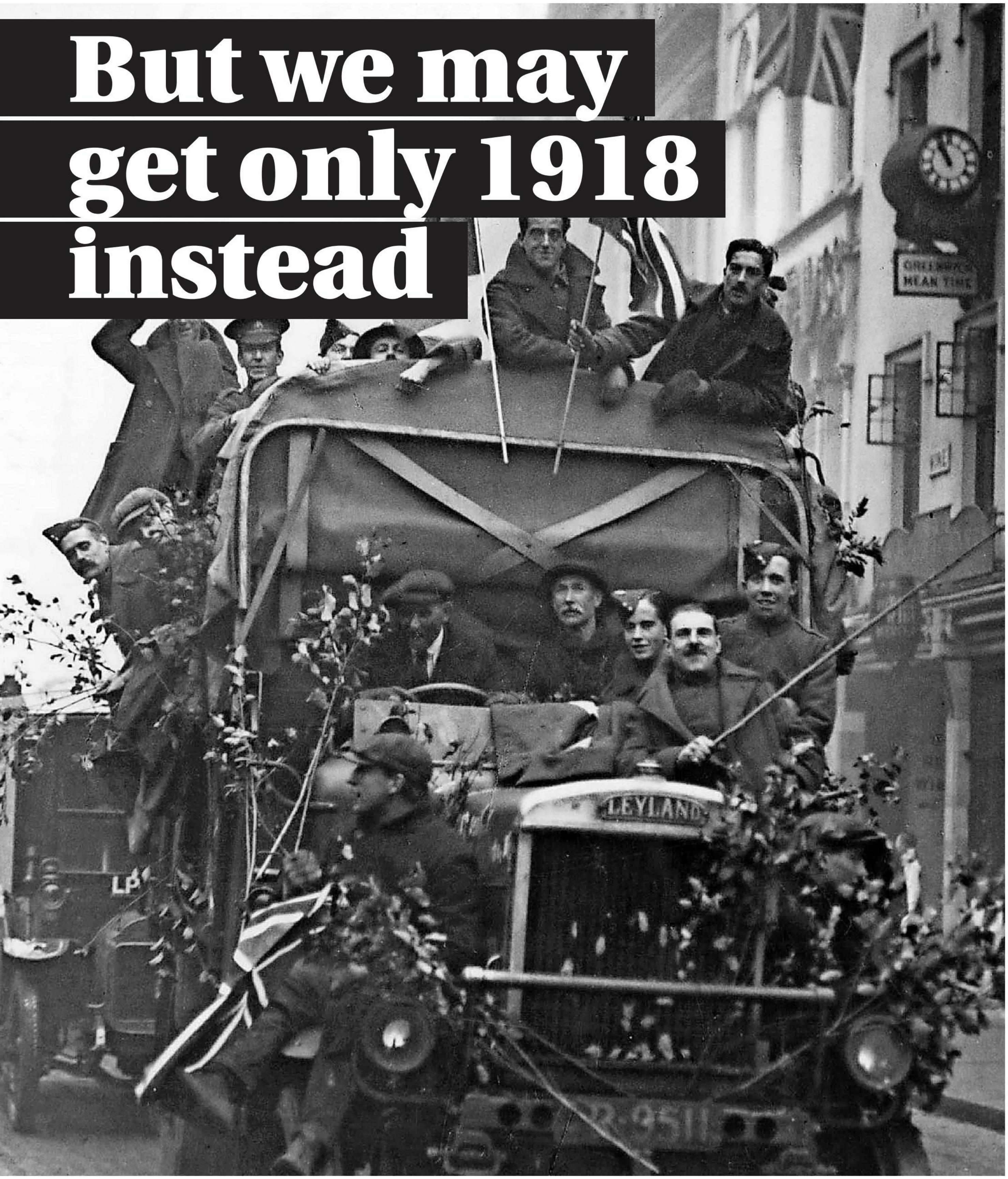
So, as in 1945, our idea of what we think the state can and should do has changed fundamentally in the last three months. Conservative ministers, who normally jeer at the idea that the state can be anything other than a nuisance and want to shrink it and leave everything to the market, have discovered that in a crisis, only the state can defend us.

So historical precedent, it seems, is with us. When coronavirus ends, it will be 1945 all over again, and we can build a New Jerusalem for the 2020s.

But here's the rub. Looking back beyond 1945, the next watershed moment is 1918. Most of the same elements are there.

The Edwardian era before the First World War had grotesque inequalities of wealth, and men came back from the war determined not to return to the same old unfair society. The war had also made commonplace the idea of the state as enabler, for the wartime government in the Great War had had to take control of

But we may get only 1918 instead



1918: Troops celebrate Armistice Day in London on November 11

Photo: Getty Images

much of the country's industry and economic activity.

Yet in 1918, unlike 1945, there was no Beveridge, no New Jerusalem. Britain sank back to a grey replica of what it had been before the war. Dreadfully disabled war veterans begged in the streets of our cities.

Here's the difference between 1918 and 1945. Labour went into the 1945 general election pledged to implement Beveridge, and had politicians with the experience and drive to do it.

Voters showed they wanted it, and Labour was returned with a 145-seat majority.

In 1918, just 24 hours after the Armistice had been signed with Germany, prime minister David Lloyd George announced an election in alliance with his coalition partners, the Conservatives, who dominated the government and wanted to return to as near the *status quo ante* as possible.

The idea was to capitalise quickly on Lloyd George's status as a war leader. Labour did not yet look like a serious contender for power, the Liberals were disastrously split, and a confused electorate did what looked like the patriotic thing.

By the time the Conservative government fell, six years later, the moment had passed.

And 2021, if that's when the coronavirus battle ends, looks like being a lot more like 1918 than 1945.

Barring something very surprising, we're stuck with the present government until May 2024. It will want us to get back to business as usual as fast as possible, to try to ensure that any Beveridge moment there might be passes unnoticed.

Ministers have taken to signalling this. Take this, from Boris Johnson's first speech on his return from illness: "Without our private sector, without the drive and commitment of the wealth creators of this country, there will be no economy to speak of, there will be no cash to pay for our public services, no way of funding our NHS."

On one level, it's just a statement of the obvious: you can't have an NHS without tax revenues. But it's meant to say much more than that.

Johnson is saying: In this crisis we have to make ritual obeisance to the public sector and public sector workers, but we know that only the market really matters.

Another straw in the wind is the odd, almost unbalanced government approach to anything concerning the EU.

There was the very strange insistence that the deadline for the end of trade talks will be kept despite coronavirus, even though the British government is putting up no proposals, and it's obvious that no deal can be done in time.

Put that together with the strange story of the ventilators. The government declined to join the EU scheme to buy ventilators and other medical gear, and it's now clear from the EU statement of April 24 that ministers were not telling the truth when they said it was a mix-up. It was deliberate policy.

Keir Starmer was right when he told me Johnson wants to smash up our remaining relationship with Europe in favour of a trade deal with Donald Trump. Starmer says that is "not just swapping one trade deal for another, it is swapping one set of values, principles and standards for another set of values, principles and standards".

But by 2024 it can be done and dusted, and everyone will have forgotten that we once had a relationship with our closest neighbours.

There are other straws in the wind. The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), a think tank founded by former work and pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith, has recommended the threshold for the state pension move to 70 by 2028 and to 75 by 2035.

Duncan Smith seems to be a proxy for the government just now, regularly appearing on television to say the things ministers want said but do not want to say themselves: that the virus is all the fault of the wicked Chinese hiding information from us, that the government's failure to get a grip at the start was all the fault of the World Health Organisation.

Johnson's calculation is that by 2024, the moment will have passed, and we will be back to as near an approximation of 2019 as the government can arrange.

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Lockdown's untold stories

Foreign correspondent CHRISTINA LAMB on what covering conflicts abroad has taught her about life – the good, and the bad – carrying on in extraordinary circumstances

CONFINEMENT: People applaud NHS workers from balconies and gardens in Wythenshawe, Manchester as life in lockdown became the new normal

Photo: Getty Images

In these strange times in which we find ourselves, I started listing things that make me happy. Listening to bossa nova. Eating grilled sardines in the alleyways of Alfama, Lisbon's old Arab quarter. Watching a pink moon rise over the rooftops. The smell of a new book. The feel of soft, white sand underfoot. The first snow in Kabul. The taste of fresh pomegranate juice. The frivolity of feather boas.

Once I interviewed Paulo Coelho, one of the world's most successful writers, and he told me he only starts writing a new book when he sees a white feather. I thought this was odd, then I saw a white feather on the train home and on the sofa in my living room and I realised white feathers are everywhere – if you look for them.

That got me thinking about things we don't see, which is very much the job of a journalist, uncovering things we might not notice or people don't want seen, and in particular the way women have been written out of history.

I never imagined living through plague, but I have spent a lot of time in war. Mostly what people see when they look at war is what I call the bang-bang. What fascinates me, however, is not the fighting but the people living behind the lines trying to keep life together as all hell is breaking loose around them. To me, they are the real heroes, and they are often the women, somehow feeding and educating the children and caring for the elderly.

Often, I found it hard to explain to people back home how, in the midst of all this, whether in Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria, life still went on. People fell in love, had babies, went shopping, to the bank, even as they dodged snipers or escaped suicide bombings. I remember how surreal it was walking through the apocalyptic streets of the Old City of Aleppo long under siege from Assad, building after building reduced to rubble and ashes, and suddenly coming across a small shop where a man was selling cigarettes and falafels.

Now we are engaged in our own war, we see how quickly we adjust to this strange new normality where people wear masks to go shopping and do the corona-swerve to avoid passers-by, where every morning sounds like a Sunday, and our heroes are not just the NHS finding themselves on the frontline but truck drivers, bin-men, carers, postmen, bus drivers, those manning supermarket tills – people we looked at but didn't really see.

At the moment, we are living in fear of something we can't see – and that will attach on many of us through its crown-shaped spikes and kill some but not others for reasons we do not yet know.

As we try to shield ourselves by staying behind closed doors, life under lockdown is producing lots of things we don't normally see – from goats window-shopping in the empty streets of Llandudno to cuckoos and blue tits in the gardens of central London.

I often talk about the kindness and strength people discover amid war and we are seeing that too, from the hundreds of thousands volunteering to all the neighbourhood WhatsApp groups offering shopping services and friendly voices.

Just as the Bosnian war saw a proliferation of window-boxes in Sarajevo, here, too, we are finding solace from growing things – as well as useful nutrition.

But there is also a dark side. Just as the heroic role of women in war is too often neglected, so is the brutality against them – wars bring widespread rape, whether as a deliberate weapon or from those taking advantage of the chaos.

There has, of course, always been rape in war. You only have to open the Bible or the very first work of written history by Herodotus to see that the Greeks, Persians and Phoenicians were all at it and, indeed, Rome was founded on abduction of women. More recently, there were the estimated two million Germans raped by the Soviet Red Army at the end of the Second World War, and the thousands of women and girls kept as 'comfort women' by the Japanese.

Yet it is almost never prosecuted, nor even mentioned in the history books. In the Philippines, last year, I met some of the last surviving comfort women, still waiting after 75 years for as much as an acknowledgement.

Over the last few years, I have seen more and more such violence, whether girls captured and taken as 'bushwives' by Boko Haram in Nigeria, Rohingya tied against banana trees and gangraped by Burmese soldiers, or Yazidis rounded up and kept as sex slaves by Isis fighters who traded them with ownership documents as if for the sale of a car. Not a single one of these men has been prosecuted.

Just as war breeds sexual violence, we are seeing how, already in this lockdown, abusers are finding untold opportunity to terrorise their victims. With people forced together in confined spaces, day after day, week after week, there are reports of a huge spike in domestic abuse, as much as 30%, what the UN is calling a shadow pandemic.

Nor is it just violence against women or children. Last week, talking to people living a rabbit-hutch existence in a London tower block, where one family of five in a two-bedroom flat told me they fear suffocation as much as coronavirus, I heard about violence from children against adults, young people addicted to drugs lashing out at those around them.

Just as at the end of a war, there are hundreds of thousands of hidden victims who go ignored, their suffering sidelined in the face of those who have been killed or lost loved ones. When we finally come out of this, many will have suffered unspeakable ordeals from which they will never recover yet may remain silent.

Look around you. There are white feathers everywhere. Next time you spot one, think of all the things we don't see.

■ Christina Lamb's latest book is *Our Bodies, Their Battlefield: What War does to Women*, published by William Collins

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LETTERS: Have your say, email letters@theneweuropean.co.uk

Boris' exit plan will be as jumbled as his Brexit plan

So, in the next few days we are promised a comprehensive plan from the Johnson stable setting out how and when we might eventually come out of lockdown.

If memory serves me right, we were going to see a comprehensive plan for adult social care before the pandemic had even started. We were also going to see the report of the National Security Committee into alleged Russian interference in the 2017 general election, now almost three years ago.

No doubt further plans to address the housing shortage, labour shortages in the NHS and elsewhere, homelessness and failing infrastructure are also in the pipeline – though, hang on a minute, weren't they going to build 200,000 houses a year, recruit 50,000 new NHS staff and thousands more to pick the crops?

Plans are useless unless they result in timely, sustained and targeted actions designed to bring about specific outcomes. Why is my level of scepticism about any new plan at an all-time high?

Rex Nesbit

Days of destiny

Saturday May 9 is Europe Day. Although the word "Brexit" has been banned, the idea of European unity – like all fascinating ideas – continues

This divergence is illustrated by the contrasting ways Europe Day is celebrated in Britain and the EU. Here it is consistently ignored. However on the continent, some official efforts are made to celebrate every May 9, but generally they are low key.

Many of your readers will be too young to remember the anniversary it marks. It is 70 years ago that the French foreign minister, Robert Schuman, astonished the world by proposing Franco-German reconciliation only five years after the end of the Second World War. And few will know that the brains behind Schuman's astonishing speech was an amazing Frenchman called Jean Monnet.

This diplomat and entrepreneur, once called "the father of Europe", is long buried. But in my ear I hear his reassuring voice saying: "Europe will not be made all at once or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements."

Alan Johns

Editor's note: Leeds' pro-EU campaign group will mark Europe Day this Saturday with a virtual 'Euro cafe'. Find out more at www.leedsforeurope.org and see details of other Europe Day events at www.theneweuropean.co.uk

Animal readers of THE NEW EUROPEAN

Reader James Mackay from Warwick writes: "Pumpkin lived happily for 14 years just down the road. But 18 months ago he had a feline midlife crisis. Before the phrase became routine, he decided not to Stay At Home. And on a sunny day last week, he helped tidy up our archive of the whole run of *The New European*."

■ Does the animal who runs your household read *TNE*? Send photographic evidence and crucial biographical details to letters@theneweuropean.co.uk, putting 'Animal Readers' in the subject field.

As we mark the anniversary of VE Day, it is worth remembering that of the 2,937 RAF pilots in the Battle of Britain, 595 were from other nations other than Britain.

James Zambonini

Unimpressed

I am one of those members of the public who are fed up with the media's attitude to the government's role in this pandemic and I read Liz Gerard's piece ("This is not the media's finest hour", *TNE* #192) with interest and some disquiet.

There are many, many things about which we would all like detailed and straightforward answers but now is not the time. The size and complexity of the problems the government faces must be both horrendous and unprecedented in peacetime. The last thing they need is for its attention to be diverted into attempting to deal with prejudiced and often ill-informed criticism.

The nature of the media coverage may eventually divert them from dealing with the practical issues involved and into obsession with political considerations, with the result that the lockdown is removed too rapidly, bringing about a resulting second spike of cases and deaths.

When this is all over we should have a full-scale enquiry by a body dominated by experts, with no holds barred and nothing kept secret. Until then let's cool all this down and deal with the practicalities.

Dudley Dean
Maresfield

The way much the UK media – not including *TNE* – has rolled over for Boris and his government has astounded and depressed me. The lack of critical distance, even from the hitherto sensible, is dumbfounding.

There seems a desire to recreate, depending on the newspaper, website or broadcaster, the spirit of the 2012 Olympics, or the Blitz or an imagined Brexit. And if this means absolving the government of responsibility, then so be it.

The brave journalists I have seen questioning Boris, pointing out the UK's still appalling death rates and asking difficult questions are in a minority. But they are doing their jobs and the inquest (as well as the history books) into this disaster will be kinder on them than their peers.

Will Goble
Rayleigh

In his recent *Sun* interview, referred to by a gushing BBC as "candid", Johnson declared he was now driven to prevent others suffering as a result of his own experience. It's a bloody shame he wasn't so 'driven' in February…

Amanda Baker
Edinburgh

Thank you so much Liz Gerard for "Falling into the clap trap" (*TNE* #191) and for daring to express a different view and bringing balance and rationality to the situation.

I am filled with gratitude and respect for the professionalism and courage of workers in the NHS , care sector and all essential retail and public services. However, sadly, the collective clap takes me outside my comfort zone and whilst it indisputably raises spirits, it doesn't address systematic underfunding, lack of PPE or decent pay and conditions for staff.

Newspapers like the *Sun* risk using the weekly clap to define us by our actions as those who care and those who don't, yet there are so many other ways to support the NHS and we should not feel pressured into restricting ourselves only to a visible weekly performance.

Kath Sainsbury
Teesside

Pierless

Piers Morgan can be really irritating sometimes and he is far from 100% right 100% of the time, but during this period I have become one of his biggest fans. Anthony Clavane ("Passing the Piers review", *TNE* #192) was spot-on.

Morgan cuts through the crap and remains focused on the question in hand. He seems more concerned about his fellow British citizens than any politician so far, and for that, I am very grateful.

Go, Piers, give them hell, continue to make them squirm.

Emma Qiao

Good Nic

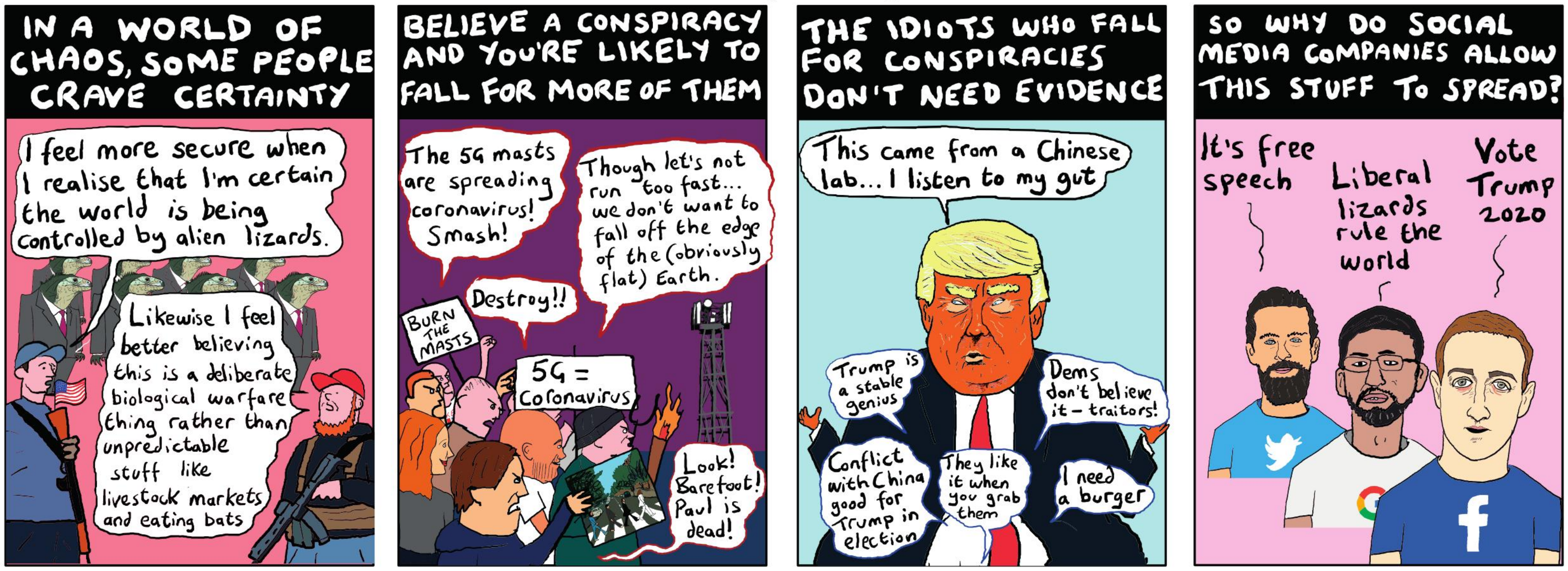
Alastair Campbell's rating of world leader's response to C-19 ("From the good to the very bad", *TNE* #192) was a good read and should be a valuable historical document for future generations seeking a contemporary view of this great crisis.

Can I suggest in the worthy of praise column, the first ministers of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland? Nicola Sturgeon, Mark Drakeford and Arlene

What's going on?

What's going on with the pandemic conspiracy theories?

TIM BRADFORD


IN A WORLD OF CHAOS, SOME PEOPLE CRAVE CERTAINTY
I feel more secure when I realise that I'm certain the world is being controlled by alien lizards.
Likewise I feel better believing this is a deliberate biological warfare thing rather than unpredictable stuff like livestock markets and eating bats
BELIEVE A CONSPIRACY AND YOU'RE LIKELY TO FALL FOR MORE OF THEM
The 5G masts are spreading coronavirus! Smash!
Though let's not run too fast... we don't want to fall off the edge of the (obviously flat) Earth.
BURN THE MASTS
Destroy!!
5G = Coronavirus
Look! Barefoot! Paul is dead!
THE IDIOTS WHO FALL FOR CONSPIRACIES DON'T NEED EVIDENCE
This came from a Chinese lab... I listen to my gut
Trump is a stable genius
Dems don't believe it – traitors!
Conflict with China good for Trump in election
They like it when you grab them
I need a burger
SO WHY DO SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES ALLOW THIS STUFF TO SPREAD?
It's free speech
Liberal lizards rule the world
Vote Trump 2020

Foster have talked responsibly, openly and soberly, treating their fellow citizens as adults to be engaged in a national effort (unlike the patronising style of masters and servants from Westminster). The Scottish parliament elections are due to be held next May. Before the C-19 crisis, polling predicted the SNP winning a big overall majority (in a voting system favouring coalitions). Anything can happen in a year, but how Nicola Sturgeon and Boris Johnson emerge from the crisis may well determine the outcome of not only the elections for Holyrood, but also the result of a referendum on independence that would surely follow SNP electoral success.

When the lockdown began, Scottish voters were by the narrowest of margins pro-independence. More than Boris Johnson's reputation now hangs by a viral thread. So too may the 313-year-old United Kingdom itself.

Martin Roche
Canterbury

Past a joke

As Will Self remarked in *TNE* #192, "woe betide anyone who cracks a joke... having any minority whatsoever at its butt."

I heard this expressed a few years ago at a Fairport Convention Cropredy festival by Jasper Carrott, reminiscing about the changes he'd seen in the comedy scene: "Nowadays you can use any words you like, but you can't say anything with them."

Peter F Kirk

Trump haiku II

In response to last week's Donald Trump haiku (Letters, *TNE* #192):

See no virus, hear
no virus, shake hands, get sick
clap hands, thousands die

Chris Fitzpatrick
Dublin

Blank verse

Here's a poem for the NHS and key workers, titled *Fill In The Gaps*

They do their shifts
they cope, they fight
they don't coll----.
And we
stay put, sit tight
inside our tr---.
Open the door
on Thursday night
cl-- the cl---
and feel alright
with Boris and all his
government ch---.
Of course it's good he
didn't rel----.
But isn't it time
to ask perh---
how hearts and flowers
can plug the g---?

Hermione Huxley

Once bitten

When writing about Sergio Leone and the classic *Once Upon a Time in the West* in *TNE* #192, it's a pity Charlie Connelly didn't mention another great European, Claudia Cardinale, who gives a superb central performance. Most reviewers tend to focus solely on its male leads Charles Bronson and Henry Fonda.

Also *Once Upon a Time in America*, another masterpiece, is marred by a horrific rape scene which is surely the most gratuitous ever filmed. It feels like it will never end. If Leone had shot it today, in the era of #MeToo, it probably would have ended his career.

Will

Charlie Connelly's 'Great European Lives' feature on Marie Tussaud (*TNE* #191) takes on trust a good deal of her questionable memoirs. While her tale of casting heads from the guillotine was highly marketable in Britain, there is little evidence for it, especially as the authorities in France had no wish to create martyr cults around the xecuted.

In particular, her claim to have taken a death mask of Maximilien Robespierre is undermined by her naming the wrong cemetery (the Madeleine, instead of Les Errancis). It would have been physically impossible, given the extensive swelling and jaw fracture from his being shot in the face 17 hours before execution, and he and his colleagues were buried in quicklime. Nor is it a life mask: its profile does not match the highly distinctive one seen in his portraits from life, traced directly by the physionotrace method.

It is likely she followed the footsteps of her teacher (and possible natural father) Curtius: as early as 1788, guidebooks to the Palais Royal noted his habit of changing the wigs and costumes of his wax figures to pass them off as new characters. She was, above all, a show-woman.

Dr M M Gilchrist
Hull

May balls

Bonnie Greer's praise for strong female leaders ("The women leading the way", *TNE* #191) makes no mention of our previous nonentity of a prime minister.

She writes, "Women leaders tend to tell the unvarnished truth, and... to move fast" and "Women leaders also tend to be decisive". We didn't see much of that in Theresa May's tortured 'negotiations' with the EU over Brexit.

Bonnie also says that, "Women leaders are not afraid to show love". As in May's response to Grenfell, perhaps?

Funnily enough (it's not funny really), the same "weak and wobbly" leadership qualities seem to have been characteristic of our current and previous Tory prime ministers (pathetic jokers all!), so perhaps rather than May it's Tory politicians that are the problem?

Tony Olsson
Kirkby-in-Ashfield

Half-cocked

The priority of testing for coronavirus should be to inform strategy, to discover where and how resources should be targeted. The NHS needs to know where the virus is prevalent, who needs to be specifically quarantined and which areas potentially could be released from lockdown.

When Matt Hancock set a target of 100,000 tests a day it was only to match the level of testing in other countries where it was already integrated into their effective strategies.

In a manic panic to reach 100,000 by April 30, 27,497 tests were mailed out. The authoritative *Health Service Journal* commented, "It is just a massive one-day mission on the part of Amazon and the Royal Mail".

No strategy, no purpose, just a desperate drive to get to 100,000 tests by the end of April. Such ridiculous attempts to meet a self imposed target, with no reference or judgement as to why such testing is so important, is both ineffective and dangerous.

Andrew Milroy
Trowbridge

▶ Turn to page 16

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From page 15

Briefing encounters

Every time I hear a minister announce that they are "straining every sinew", "working night and day" and "doing everything possible," I am reminded of a curt comment made to me by an Ofsted inspector: "The government does not pay us to be interested in good intentions. We are only interested in outcomes".

Perhaps the government should measure itself by its own standards.

Paul Stein
Pickering

I am a student in year 12 and was incredibly disappointed to find out that in order to submit a question for the Covid-19 daily briefings, you have to be over the age of 18. This wipes out the voices and concerns of young people, who too are affected by this crisis.

Our education, our happiness, and our futures are at stake. We have concerns about these and more – from our mental health, to how the government will support us as young people, and other personal and political queries.

Because of this, I started a petition for the government to accept questions from under-18s. It can be accessed here: http://chng.it/Lv9CL57K

Janey Little

Fatal distraction

I am 82 years of age and in my working life was a project manager controlling major projects in the power supply industry. The shambles we are now experiencing highlights a government with minimal knowledge of project management, with the result that people at the coal face are dying because of incompetence.

Analysing all the evidence, I can only conclude that Brexit made this government take its eye off the impending catastrophe of Covid-19. All projects have problems, but when 27,000 die because of a lack of cohesion by the project managers it is unacceptable from a country which is among the richest in the world.

Michael Morris
Glasgow

If the Chinese government had announced a pandemic on December 23, do you think this Brexit-obsessed "bung a bob for Big Ben" government would have taken any notice?

On January 23 the WHO warned the world of a global pandemic and the UK government did nothing. On February 23, ditto. It wasn't until March 23 that they finally acted.

The Brexit virus has eviscerated our country and now we have two to fight.

Kathy Erasmus
London

Stranded keyworkers with no end to their shift in sight

EF EMIRA
COSCO
CHINA SHIPPING

TRAPPED: A freight vessel anchored in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Greece in April. The ship was forced to wait for Covid-19 restrictions to be eased before its cargo could be unloaded at the Port of Thessaloniki
Photo: Getty Images

HELEN DEVEREUX reports on the forgotten plight of merchant sailors trapped on their ships by the virus

At the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, much attention was paid to the plight of cruise tourists. Governments around the world closed their ports to cruise ships and refused to allow passengers to disembark. While all those tourists are now ashore, those who work on the ships themselves are not, with an estimated 100,000 cruise ship workers currently stranded.

The same is true of workers on cargo ships. There are an estimated 1.6 million seafarers working onboard various types of vessels. These men and women are responsible for transporting 90% of the world's trade. From the food that we eat to the clothes that we wear, pretty much everything we own has been transported by a seafarer. These workers live and work onboard for months at a time, and with an average crew size of just 23 people, seafarers are used to social isolation.

On the surface, all seems well: goods are still flowing. But the men and women who are transporting them are struggling. In a normal month, around 100,000 seafarers leave their ships and are replaced by others. But these crew changes have been cancelled. Over a month ago, Maersk, the world's largest container line, suspended all crew changes. It recently extended the suspension and other shipping lines have done the same.

An estimated 150,000 seafarers are currently waiting to go home and for every day that passes, even more of them are finishing their expected tour of duty but remaining stranded. Seafarers onboard cargo ships are now, in effect, prisoners unable to leave their vessel, even to go ashore and use basic facilities such as the internet, that most of us take for granted.

I'm in contact with some of these men and women. Andy, a captain onboard a ship with 13 crew, has told me that as of April 24 more than three-quarters of the crew are still onboard, despite finishing their tour of duty. He said: "The worst part is the not knowing, having nothing to work towards mentally." It's hard to understand a situation whereby you go to work only to be told you can't go home and no one has any idea of when you'll be able to.

Stranded seafarers are missing key events at home, such as the birth of children. Their partners and families are left to cope in the pandemic without them, with no idea when they will return home.

Even in normal times, the delayed return of a seafarer can be particularly tough on families, especially those with young children, with many workers eagerly counting down the days. Nearly half of Andy's crew left home in November, long before any mention of Covid-19. He told me: "It's becoming more and more difficult to maintain morale and I'm worried that our minds are all increasingly focused on other matters and because of this one of us might do something unsafe."

Andy is right to worry. This is a dangerous industry, with seafarers 21 times more likely to be killed in a work-related accident than workers ashore. In addition to their minds no longer being on the job, those onboard are also likely to be suffering from fatigue, owing to the fact they are likely working 10 hours a day, seven days a week.

Remaining onboard beyond the expected end of a tour poses a risk for safety. One senior officer told me about a time when he had been waiting, with his suitcase, for a helicopter to leave the vessel when he learned that the worker due to relieve him was no longer coming. He had to remain onboard for five more days. During this time, he reported being unable to focus on the job and thinking only about being at home. He readily acknowledged that during this time he was a risk to both himself and the ship.

As well as posing an issue for safety, remaining onboard beyond the expected end of a tour of duty has an adverse impact on seafarers' wellbeing. Seafarers struggle to remain positive when they don't go home, with one explaining to me that going home on the expected date was hugely important and that he'd seen colleagues get very upset when they weren't relieved on time. The adverse impact on wellbeing is particularly concerning given that a study last year found seafarers have relatively high rates of depression and thoughts of suicide. Given concerns for both their safety and wellbeing, it is vital that governments around the world work together to get those seafarers who have finished their tour of duty home. And when they do, we should all thank these hidden keyworkers for their sacrifices.

■ Helen Devereux is a researcher in seafarer health and safety at Solent University; this article also appears at theconversation.com

Bonnie Greer

Watching the English

Among the consequences of living in lockdown are the things that you suddenly see. That you suddenly know. For example, I have come to realise that I have been a Londoner for longer than I lived in the city I was born and grew up in, Chicago.

Unconsciously, I think, I have spent most of my time not only looking at Londoners, but dissecting the English. Or rather what the French call *l'Angleterre profonde*. When you live somewhere and haven't any roots there, on an unconscious level you are always investigating, always looking around. Listening.

During this lockdown I have brought this activity to the surface – my scrutiny, my dissection of 'England'. Not the real England, the authentic thing, but the entity that is sold abroad and to those in this country too. This is the entity that largely accounts for the success of Julian Fellowes. And not only him.

Now I can see that part of me lives here as if I'm watching a film, sitting back in a darkened theatre, observing.

The United States is natural to me: I understand, in a rather horrible way, why Michigan protestors against the lockdown went to their State House armed with guns and waving flags. To the outside world this looks appalling. And it is.

But, in a sense, this is a literal manifestation of what Americans think they are and what they think the country is. It is the movie running inside each American, a blockbuster starring themselves. And this is the 'American Dream'. It is the old cry of "give me liberty or give me death!" which every American carries somewhere inside them, too.

To be an American is about exceptionalism. Americans do not have things happen to them the way that others do. The US is the exception to all rules. Many Americans, deep down inside, truly believe that the Covid-19 virus will skip them, if they only believe, that somehow it will all come out alright in the end, like in a Tom Hanks movie. Just have faith.

Of course, Americans can see the racial, health and economic disparities which this pandemic has revealed. But to be American is about who *you* are. What *you* want to do.

Doctors can yell and scream and hold up all kinds of statistics. But in the end, every American is Dorothy on that yellow brick road clicking the heels of those ruby slippers together. For Trump's base their response to the president's lying and constant moving of the goalposts is "so what? He's allowed to dream, isn't he?" If you don't dream metaphorically, you are not an American. And besides, Trump was a real estate mogul and reality show host. And now he's president of the United States. So all things are possible in the USA. Right? That is America. That I get.

I also get Andrew Cuomo, governor of New York sparring with his younger brother Chris, the CNN anchor about who their mother really loves. On live TV. This is what the country is.

But what has come to my consciousness lately is that I watch television to discover England. Not the real place. But the myth, the thing it thinks about itself and wants to show to the world.

First, I have become dedicated to the historian and broadcaster Michael Wood. He has made me a fanatic regarding the Anglo Saxons, those utter geniuses who made their way over here from what is now Germany and the Netherlands. The roots of the English language are largely their invention.

The language originated in Anglia, a small Baltic peninsula in Southern Schleswig, in what is now northern Germany. You can hear Old English spoken on Wood's excellent series of documentaries. You can also hear the accent of the forerunner to modern English, the tone and emphasis of which has a distinct Dutch/Germanic sound.

The English have always liked kings and queens, and the Anglo Saxons had Alfred the Great and his daughter, Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians, sovereign in her own right as was her daughter who succeeded her. I think that deep inside somewhere, the English are not at all averse to women ruling them.

But even Michael Wood cannot hold a candle in the dissection of *l'Angleterre profonde* found in the works of Dame Agatha Christie and in the long-running detective series *Midsomer Murders*, particularly the latter series starring Neil Dudgeon.

In Christie's novels featuring Poirot, and the television adaptations, you find plenty of references to the Belgian detective with the steel-trap brain being a "foreigner". Even when he has become the most famous detective in England, Christie does not allow the English to raise him above suspicion. The greatest insult hurled at his prowess is that he is a foreigner and he must constantly correct the English who consistently call him French.

The novels and the television versions are beautifully observed in relation to the English class system, from parlour maids to duchesses. The killer is almost always someone whose 'Englishness' drove them to murder. Common motives include anger over being left out of a will, reputation, revenge, or just plain status. All England is here.

Midsomer Murders represents a modern version of this. Midsomer is a mythos place, set in villages in what feels like the Home Counties. Even the Queen is a fan.

One episode that deserves every reward going regarding Englishness is about a murder concerning a craft beer named after a friar executed in the 14th century. The modern day Midsomer victim is killed in exactly the same way as the medieval friar, plunged into boiling oil. Sheer English village genius.

Suspects there are now an ethnically diverse bunch of English people who pop in and out, having committed various deeds. Mostly in secret. Secrecy being an ace English trait that both Christie and the *Midsomer* team employ magnificently.

Midsomer is the opposite of the *Inspector Morse* series, which, with its spin-offs, is a kind of 'Via Dolorosa' of Englishness. And this is seldom interesting, except perhaps in the poems of Philip Larkin. My lockdown has become a kind of research tool, a way to understand parts of my adopted land and its people, at the deepest level. It helps me understand things like why Boris Johnson is PM; why Piers Morgan has a job; what *Britain's Got Talent* really means, and *Only Connect*, too. This is a show I once did to aid charity and sat there thinking that it made no sense. Which is the entire point.

Oscar Wilde once called the fox-hunting English aristocracy "the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable". And even though fox hunting is banned, some of the English have found a way for it to survive. Survival is a great English trait. An example of this is what the grandson of Queen Victoria did. George V launched arguably the greatest re-branding exercise of the 20th century. His decision to change his family name from Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, to its principal place of residence, Windsor, was a masterstroke. No doubt Poirot would have suggested doing this. After he had finished investigating a murder in the quiet grounds of Windsor Castle.

1

2

3

ENGLISH TRAITS:
1 *Michael Wood's Story of England*
Photo: BBC

2 Neil Dudgeon in Midsomer Murders
Photo: ITV

3 David Suchet as Poirot
Photo: ITV

The art of opposition homeworking

TIM WALKER talks to Lib Dem acting leader Ed Davey about the role of politics during the pandemic, and what Keir Starmer's success could do for his own party's prospects

Sir Ed Davey is working from home in his south London constituency, but, while his daily commute from his bed to his desk is shorter, the hours are longer than ever.

In the first few weeks of lockdown, his priority was repatriating over 100 constituents who were stranded abroad in far-flung countries. Now he's doing what he can for distressed local businesses, ensuring local elderly and vulnerable people are fed, and then there are all of the responsibilities that come with being his party's acting parliamentary leader.

He is also, with his wife Emily, sharing childminding duties and it's up to him to supervise music practice for their 12-year-old son John, who is severely disabled.

"I recognise I'm lucky still to be drawing a salary when so many people aren't," says Davey, the 54-year-old MP for Kingston and Surbiton, as a melody begins to take shape in the background. "I've a few members of staff helping me, but of course they are all having to work from home and two have children of their own, so I can't very well ask anyone to take the phone when it starts to ring. Emily is a huge help to me, but she is also a local councillor so she has her own responsibilities, too."

After Jo Swinson lost her seat in East Dunbartonshire in the general election, the Lib Dem constitution dictated that Davey, as the party's deputy leader, should take over, along with its president Sal Brinton (subsequently replaced by Mark Pack), until a replacement can be chosen.

It was the decision of the party's governing federal board to put off the vote for a new leader until this time next year on the basis that an election would distract from the current crisis.

The length of the delay clearly frustrates Davey and he says he hopes very much that the decision can be reconsidered so that the party can have in place a duly-elected leader before Christmas.

In the meantime, Davey is not just marking time. He was the first to call for the 'virtual' recall of parliament, and, once the crisis is over, an independent public inquiry into how the government responded to it.

His has since been an occasionally critical – but always constructive and informed – voice within the brave new world of online democracy. He has spoken of how the government must stop bailing out companies domiciled overseas for tax purposes, pushed for measures to help the NHS and care home workers, and asked that a select committee be set up – he graciously suggested that it be chaired by the leader of the opposition – to scrutinise the government's actions on the coronavirus.

He wants, too, an amendment to the Brexit legislation to allow for the maximum possible two-year extension period to be requested.

"Keir Starmer has taken up the idea of the select committee, and I hope, soon, he will come to support pausing the Brexit process, but on that we face an uphill struggle.

"Michael Gove has already indicated that it will go ahead no matter what. The Lib Dems are not denying the democratic mandate the government has to deliver Brexit, but we're just saying that in all the circumstances it would make a lot more sense to put it on hold until we're over this current crisis and can discuss it with the EU in a more considered and focused way.

"Sadly, there are people within the Conservative Party who knew all along how damaging Brexit would be to our economy and way of life, and, somewhat perversely, they see the aftermath of the crisis we're in now as the best possible time to implement a no-deal. They know it will give cover for the damage their policy was always bound to inflict."

So far as the coronavirus is concerned, Davey feels there is nothing to be gained by being "finger-pointingly party political", and says that, while there are legitimate questions that need to be asked about, for instance, whether the government should have locked the country down earlier, they should be kept for the public inquiry.

"Of course the Tories cannot be blamed for the coronavirus, but there are so many questions that will need to be answered, such as why, after the trial-run we had for a pandemic – codenamed Cygnus – four years ago, we hadn't made the recommended provision for ventilators, PPE and critical care beds. We will have to ask also why big events such as Cheltenham [Festival] were allowed to take place.

"The statistics would appear to show that our number of fatalities is greater than any other developed country, except for the United States, but again we will need to examine them with care after this is over and make sure we are looking at them according to the same measurements as other countries.

"The key thing we need to look at, I am told, is 'excess deaths, age-adjusted', which will give us a clearer picture of how the coronavirus has increased mortality rates."

There are those who say that in a time of national crisis everyone, irrespective of traditional party allegiances, should get behind the government, but Davey says the opposition parties have a constitutional duty to hold the government to account at all times, and it's never more important to do that when lives are at stake.

He is determined to ensure that the government has thought through the way it plans to relax lockdown and is transparent about its reasoning.

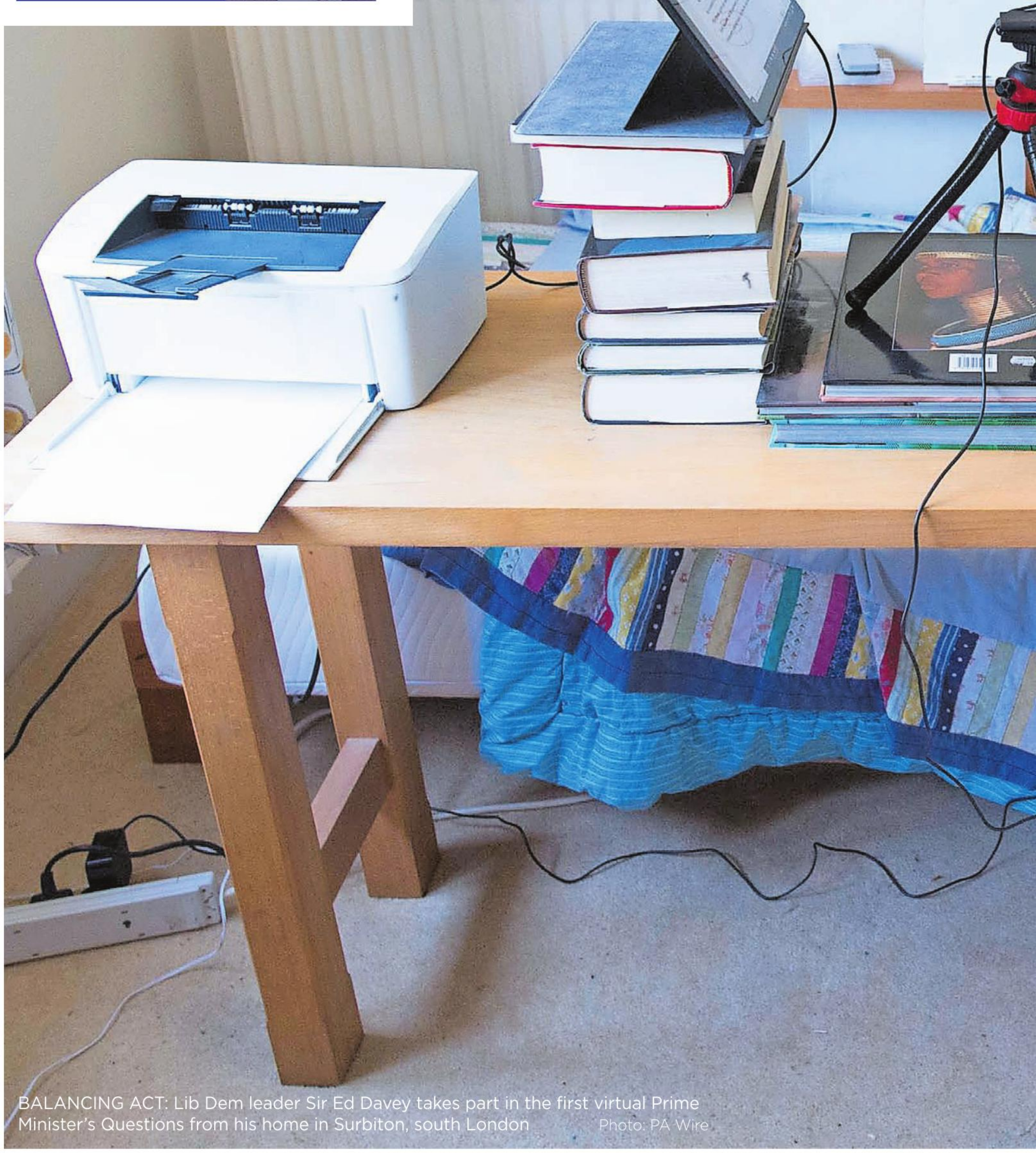
"Much is being made of the tension between the economy and a prolonged lockdown, but it benefits no one if it's lifted early or without proper thought as the second wave could be worse that the first.

"It's welcome that testing is now finally taking place on a much larger scale, but I have concerns about whether the preparations are now as advanced as they should be for tracing people, post lockdown, who have been in contact with those who are positive.

"In the coalition government, I sat round the table at National Security Council meetings and I know how complicated decisions of this kind can be, but it seems to me the best way forward is for government to be a lot clearer about the science and the options and to treat people like adults.

"I'd like to know, for instance, how susceptible children are to the coronavirus and how infectious they may be. The decision on when to reopen schools will obviously turn on that."

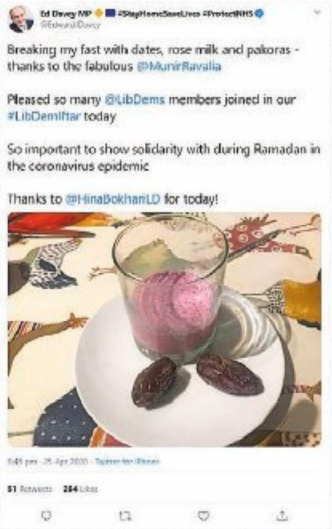
As his party's acting leader, Davey has not sought to take advantage of his position by declaring his candidacy to



BALANCING ACT: Lib Dem leader Sir Ed Davey takes part in the first virtual Prime Minister's Questions from his home in Surbiton, south London Photo: PA Wire

COVID 19 – APRIL
① PPE
→ NHS + CARE STAFF
→ UK PRODUCTION
→ STANDARDS
② TESTING → need for COMMUN
→ 100,000 ??!
③ INQUIRY → independent, judge-led
④ Foodbanks + vulnerable
⑤ BUSINESS + SELF-EMPLOYED →

AWKWARD


Ed Davey MP #StayHomeSaveLives #ProtectNHS
@EdwardJDavey

Breaking my fast with dates, rose milk and pakoras - thanks to the fabulous @MunirRavalia

Pleased so many @LibDems members joined in our #LibDemIftar today

So important to show solidarity with during Ramadan in the coronavirus epidemic

Thanks to @HinaBokhariLD for today!

51 Retweets 284 Likes

Davey is among several Liberal Democrats observing Ramadan this year, including one councillor who tweeted a picture of himself with a plate of bacon.

succeed Swinson, but there seems little doubt that, when the moment comes, he will be fighting Layla Moran and Wera Hobhouse for the leadership.

Davey was defeated by Swinson in last year's contest, but subsequently offered her his unqualified support. He has since refrained from uttering a word of criticism of the very personalised way she had set about campaigning in the election in a bus emblazoned with the words "Jo Swinson's Lib Dems".

He was rumoured not to have been convinced by her initial policy of revoking Brexit, but defends her decision to have supported, along with Jeremy Corbyn, the original vote for a general election.

"I think there would have had to have been a general election before too long. The ideal would of course to have had a People's Vote first, but there was no guarantee either that we'd ever have got that or we'd have won it. You then get into the undesirable alternatives of an election after Brexit, with or without a deal."

Lockdown could well mean the Lib Dems have to have an online leadership contest, but that would almost certainly favour Davey as it would make it more of a battle of thoughts and ideas than the optics. His sex almost certainly stood against him in the contest against Swinson, when there was a huge imperative within his party to finally have a woman leading the party.

During the general election, Swinson was noticeably defensive about her party's period in coalition with David Cameron's Tories – even though she had herself served in ministerial positions – but Davey, for his part, says the party has every right to take pride in those years. "Sure, we had to make some undesirable compromises, but we also achieved a great deal, not least quadrupling our reliance on renewable energy, making same sex marriage lawful, getting the lowest earners out of tax and introducing the pupil premium policy to help the most disadvantaged youngsters."

As the fourth party after the election, the Lib Dems are now inevitably struggling for airtime and what coverage they get in right-wing newspapers is inevitably hostile.

Much was made of a Lib Dem councillor who inadvertently tweeted a picture of himself with a plate of bacon in "solidarity" with Muslims fasting for Ramadan. "That was misrepresented and was obviously a mistake, but it shouldn't detract from the key liberal tenet that everyone has the right to practice their faith," says Davey. "After all the Islamophobia we have seen in our politics and in the headlines, we need to make it clear to Muslims how much we value the contribution they make to our nation's life.

"So many Muslims working in the NHS have made the ultimate sacrifice in the fight we are now all engaged in against the coronavirus.

"When lives are at stake, it's vitally important that the media reports responsibly. I've been concerned by the naivety of some papers in unquestioningly repeating the government lines. Still, I doubt any of our newspapers have said anything as irresponsible as the president of the United States with his ludicrous comments about ingesting disinfectant.

"All of us with any kind of public profile at all need to consider every word we utter with care and ensure what we are saying is accurate."

Davey was relieved that Starmer won the Labour leadership contest and reckons it will be good, too, for the Lib Dems. "The unique toxicity of Jeremy Corbyn meant that a great many disillusioned Tory voters were too afraid to back our party in the last election lest they inadvertently let in Labour with the extreme positions it held during his leadership.

"It's always disadvantaged us when Labour has had a leader that is seen as too extreme – from Michael Foot with the SDP Liberal Alliance to Neil Kinnock's time and the infamous Sheffield rally, through to the 2015 election and the fears that Ed Miliband would end up doing a deal with the SNP. It remains to be seen how much Starmer can push back against Momentum, and clearly he has his battles on anti-Semitism, but it's in all our interests that Labour becomes an effective party once again."

Davey laughs self-deprecatingly when I suggest that Starmer has maybe demonstrated that safe pairs of hands are coming back into fashion among the opposition parties. "The country and the world that emerges from this crisis will be very different to what went before and I am determined to fight for the kind of liberal values that have always defined our country," he says.

"In the last election, I think a lot of people saw us as a party that was only concerned about Brexit, which I think was unfair. What we are now living through highlights the importance of so many other policies that we've long been passionate about, not least great health care and the environment. We need, too, to put our young people first since the coronavirus – in addition to Brexit – will inevitably have an impact on their life chances. If we don't care about our young, we don't care about our future."

Alastair Campbell

Editor-at-Large

Memories from another world

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When I recently listed on these pages '20 things I miss in the lockdown', cinema came in at No.11, well behind Burnley FC at No.1, but tucked in just behind live sport on TV.

So in normal times, we would have watched Keira Knightley's latest film at our local Everyman. The coronavirus having shut down the cinemas, however, the roll-out of *Misbehaviour* was released through video on demand, and last week, my partner Fiona and I settled down to watch it with our daughter Grace.

Just as *Bend It Like Beckham*, which first made its star famous, was so much more than its 'sports comedy rom com' label, so *Misbehaviour*, though funny, dramatic and feelgood, is much more than the 'feelgood comedy drama' on the label.

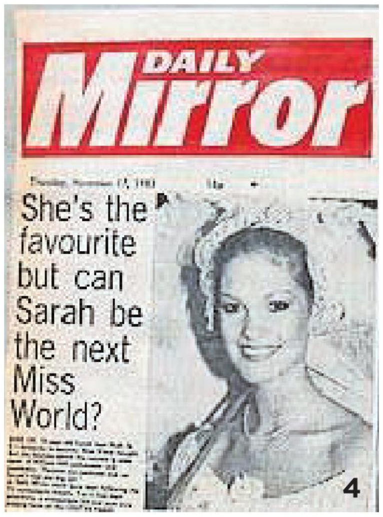
It is also a significant historical film, sexism and racism central to the story; and for young feminist activists like Grace, as well as old stagers like me, it has an important message about campaigning.

There was an added personal element for me in watching the story, based on true events, of 'women's libbers' disrupting the Miss World beauty pageant of 1970; because as a young *Daily Mirror* reporter in 1983, I was assigned to cover the Miss World circus organised by Eric and Julia Morley.

The film brought back so many memories, of the contestants with their mix of charm and beauty, innocence and terror; of flirting wildly, with Miss Paraguay and Miss France in particular; of the mumsy chaperones who ensured the flirting never got out of hand; of the tackiness behind the scenes, and the glamour that sparkled once the cameras were live at the Albert Hall; of the Morleys, brilliant at what they did, but unable to comprehend 'women's lib' arguments against the whole spectacle.

"God, was it really like this?" Grace asked, as tape measures went around tits, waists and bums, and compere Bob Hope no less groped, goggled and innuendoed his way through proceedings. "It's gross."

Yes, it was like that. The girls were herded around like cattle, gawped at like



DAILY Mirror

She's the favourite but can Sarah be the next Miss World?

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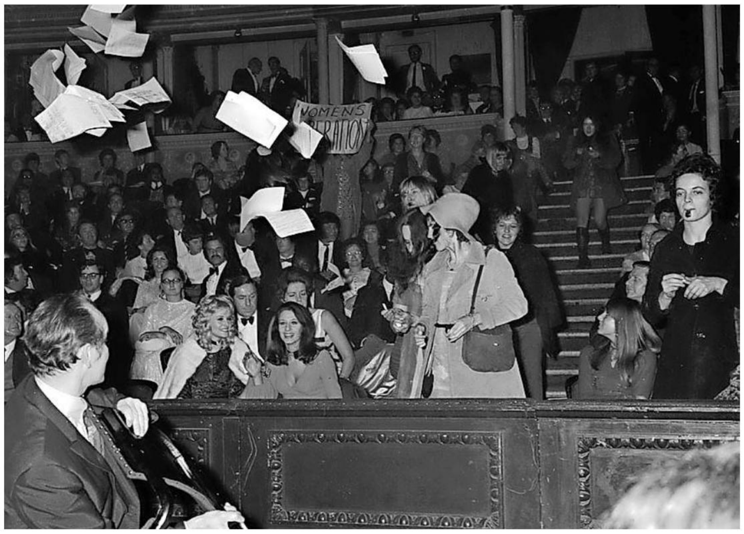
DIFFERENT AGE: **1** Miss United Kingdom Sarah-Jane Hutt is crowned Miss World 1983 at the Royal Albert Hall flanked by runners-up Rocio Isabel Luna (Miss Colombia) and Catia Pedrosa (Miss Brazil)
Photo: Getty Images

2 Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Suki Waterhouse, and Clara Rosager in *Misbehaviour*
Photo: PA

3 Rhys Ifans and Keeley Hawes as Eric and Julia Morley in the film
Photo: PA

4, **5** Cuttings from his scrapbooks reveal how Alastair Campbell covered the 1983 Miss World contest for the *Daily Mirror*

MISS WORLD 1970



REBELLION: Protestors invade the 1970 Miss World contest at the Royal Albert Hall – the events that inspired *Misbehaviour*
Photo: Getty Images

The film *Misbehaviour* dramatises the events of the 1970 Miss World competition, held in London. The contest was embroiled in controversy even before it began, after organisers allowed two entries from South Africa, one white and one black.
On the evening of the awards, a bomb exploded under a BBC outside broadcast van in an unsuccessful attempt by the Angry Brigade, the far left militant group. to prevent it being televised.
During the evening there were protests by Women's Liberation activists, who threw flour bombs. The host Bob Hope was also heckled.
In the end, Jennifer Hosten, from Grenada, became the first black woman to win the title.

cattle, and judged like cattle. But I had to confess that Miss World, created in 1951, six years before I was born, was so much a part of our childhood and upbringing, that it all seemed perfectly reasonable at the time.

Up at the top of the house are dozens of scrapbooks, into which my thousands of stories as a reporter were proudly glued. I dug them out to show Grace the pieces I wrote about Miss World in 1983. Oh my God! She was shocked, and I can see why.

She has spent her life thinking her Dad was a serious political figure, and suddenly she learns that he actually wrote this, in his "guide to the contenders":

MISS PARAGUAY: If there were a separate title for Miss Sexy, it would go to flirty ANTONELLA MONTUORI, 21. She's the cream of the South American beauties. Her constant flashing smile, sexy laugh and bubbling personality give her an edge over the others.

STATISTICS: 34-23-34.

MISS FRANCE: Twenty-year-old *FREDERIQUE LEROY from Bordeaux has attracted heavy betting. Brown-haired, brown-eyed, she's been charming all week, with a typically French cute, sexy smile. She speaks three languages, including English, which will go down well in the interview.*

STATISTICS: 34-22-34.

On the day of the big event itself, due to be shown live on BBC1, I had a two-page centre-spread under the headline "Be your own Miss World judge", with a sweepstake form, and a score card for the three judging elements – swimsuit, interview, formal dress.

Being a public service newspaper we gave the latest betting odds. Miss UK 5-1, France 7-1, Israel, Chile and Germany 10-1.

Then a panel on "what the *Mirror* experts think". I went for Miss France to win, Miss Paraguay second and Miss India third. Photographer Brendan Monks picked Miss USA first, Miss France second, Miss Ireland third. Women's editor Christena Appleyard tipped Miss Paraguay first, Miss Spain second, Miss USA third.

None of our choices made the top three. The bookies got it right. Miss UK Sarah Jane Hutt became Miss World and I ended up looking rather foolish, having confidently written hours earlier: "After spending 11 days with the 72 hopefuls, the *Mirror*'s verdict on Sarah is – no chance."

Second and third behind Miss UK were Miss Colombia and Miss Brazil. My expert assessment of "South American beauties" was not at one with the view of the judges.

By now, I am trying to stop Grace from seeing some of the other stories I wrote in the run-up. Miss Yugoslavia Bernarda Marovt "in hot water" because topless pictures taken in the past had emerged, prompting Julia Morley to accuse the organisers of Miss Yugoslavia of "bringing Miss World into disrepute".

"She's not even topless," Grace yelled as she grabbed the scrapbook, and studied the pictures of Bernarda in "skimpy black see-through outfits" under a big Page 3 headline: "Miss Yugoslavia as viewers won't see her on TV."

I tracked down Miss Yugoslavia organiser David Husic who had an interesting line of defence: 'I can't see what the fuss is about. In our country it is perfectly normal to walk round topless. It is a very hot country.'

My favourite story though, headlined "They must think we're drips", illustrated by a photo of all 72 girls in Trafalgar Square dancing to *Singing in the Rain* and twirling umbrellas, was about the 'IQ tests' they had to do. I had a string of angry quotes from contestants – USA, UK, Austria, Germany – who felt their intelligence was insulted.

Here is the maths section:

6 + 7 = ? They were given five answers to choose from, including 13.

A bit harder, but not much, 3 x 8 = 12 x ?

And finally, ? – 1.3 = 2.2

Some claimed the tests were influenced by a computer firm which was among the sponsors, but "a Miss World spokesman" insisted: "A girl will not lose just because these tests show that she's thick."

Reading it all again now, it really does underline how much the world has changed. And reading it with Grace, a feminist campaigner who can barely bring herself to believe her feminist Mum and tries-to-be feminist Dad lived and worked in that world, and tolerated it, underlines that further.

This is what makes it such an interesting film from the perspective of the campaigner. My favourite film about campaigning is probably *Milk*, in which Sean Penn plays Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected representative in the United States.

The arc of progress from gay man regularly being attacked and discriminated against, to gay politician feted for being the successful driver of legislative change on gay rights, is clear. But you cannot tell when the progress came. The change was not the legislation that eventually he got passed; that was the consequence of change, not the cause. It was campaigning that secured the change.

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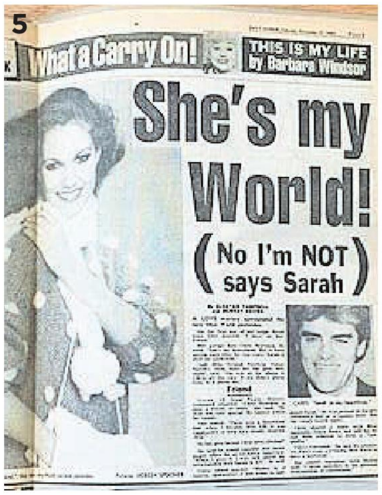


What a Carry On!
THIS IS MY LIFE by Barbara Windsor
She's my World!
(No I'm NOT says Sarah)

The women's lib campaigners in *Misbehaviour* are a pretty motley mix, most of them living commune-style in Islington – where else? – refusing to watch TV or engage with the media, who are deemed to be part of the patriarchy against which they are rebelling. But Keira Knightley's character, middle class mature student Sally Alexander, joins forces with mouthy working class Jo Robinson, played by Jessie Buckley, to see the possibilities to the wider cause in disrupting Miss World on its big night, with the world's media watching and many covering it live.

There is a tension between the two women, because of their very different backgrounds and different approaches to the cause. But for me the key moment in the film is when it becomes clear they are both equally and powerfully driven by the insight that change only comes if individuals decide to make it come and then do whatever is necessary to bring that about.

What it took for Sally and Jo and their friends was the courage to enter the lion's den, to make a noise, to be dismissed and derided by conventional views of the time, to be arrested and charged. The change they were fighting for didn't come then. But that moment was a part of change over time.

There is a lovely end to the film when the famous faces of Knightley, Buckley and Gugu Mbatha-Raw, who plays Miss Grenada, the first black winner of Miss World, give way to the faces of the real people they played, as they are today, in various stages of wrinkledom.

I did not know any of their names till I watched the film, and Keira Knightley's name will doubtless always be better known than theirs. But they are a part of a big story, major change, which played a part in Grace growing up in a better world for women than her Mum did. That is how progress works.

Eric Morley died in 2000, but Julia is still alive, and so is Miss World. For the past six years, however, its UK broadcast partner has been London Live, and the *Daily Mirror* gave up doing Grand National style sweepstakes many moons ago. As for Miss Paraguay… I would love to know.

PM's book for children is another schoolboy error

Steve Anglesey

Two earnest and connected hopes for young Wilfred Lawrie Nicholas Johnson: One, that on December 13, 2024, his dad suddenly has a lot more time on his hands with which he can spend reading to him. Two, that no matter how hard his father tries to sneak it into the bedside pile, the reading matter in question does not include *The Perils of the Pushy Parents* by Boris Johnson.

Who even knew the prime minister had written a children's book? But there it is from 2007, buried in his bibliography beneath the collections of columns, the self-serving Churchill biography, the book of sub-Clarkson car reviews ("it was as though the whole county of Hampshire was lying back and opening her well-bred legs to be ravished by the Italian stallion") and the highly dubious *Four Lions*-alike flop comic novel *Seventy-Two Virgins*, with its references to "a mega-titted six-footer" and the where-to-start sentence "The interesting thing about his half-caste looks, he decided, was that he didn't look Negroid".

Unlike other Johnson efforts, *The Perils of the Pushy Parents* is not racist or sexist. It's just bad, confirming that Johson's most successful fiction – like EU bans on prawn cocktail crisps and non-conformist bananas – is created when he is pretending to write facts.

But while it may lack the outrages of his other work, it does confirm plenty of our worst suspicions about Boris Johnson: that he's lazy, that he's pompous, that he's a con man.

Why don't we know about *The Perils of the Pushy Parents*? Perhaps because Johnson appears to have written it to mark the 100th anniversary of Hilaire Belloc's 1907 book *Cautionary Tales for Children*, which featured poems like *Jim, Who Ran Away From His Nurse, And Was Eaten By A Lion*, which became a favourite of the monologist and actress Joyce Grenfell.

No doubt the book was a favourite during Johnson's childhood, but by 2007 youngsters had moved on to other kinds of Bellocs – the Harry Potter finale was the year's best-selling book – and this might explain why Boris' work appears to have sunk without trace and failed to resurface since.

Belloc himself was a comic writer and chancer who dabbled in politics (he was briefly a Liberal MP while also being a leading light in the anti-suffrage movement) and fancied himself a historian. He wrote some dodgy stuff about Islam too. Amazing, isn't it, that Johnson identifies with him?

Yet while Belloc's 1907 work entranced children with its wit and grace, Johnson's 2007 follow-up proceeds with all the elan of a middle-aged man rugby-tackling a 10-year-old for publicity and LOLs. The plainly autobiographical plot, illustrated by Johnson's own line drawings of a bowl-haired blond boy, involves Jim and Molly Albacore ("the nicest kids you ever saw") and their mum and dad, who have high hopes for their offspring.

Says the mother: "We'd rather hoped the BBC/Would hire you as a news trainee. And after that, it's our intent/To shove you into parliament. Up the greasy pole and then/Propel you into Number 10." Now, whose fortuitous career path does that remind you of?

The Johnson-Albacore parents, like so many real-life tutors, editors, civil servants, cabinet colleagues and electors, want Boris/Jim to settle down and get on with his work. Naturally, he disagrees and would rather watch telly.

You get the sense that both sides won skirmishes as Johnson grew up – in this text the author is able to namecheck Aristotle, Cecil B de Mille, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and Zeno of Elea without any real sense that he understands their significance.

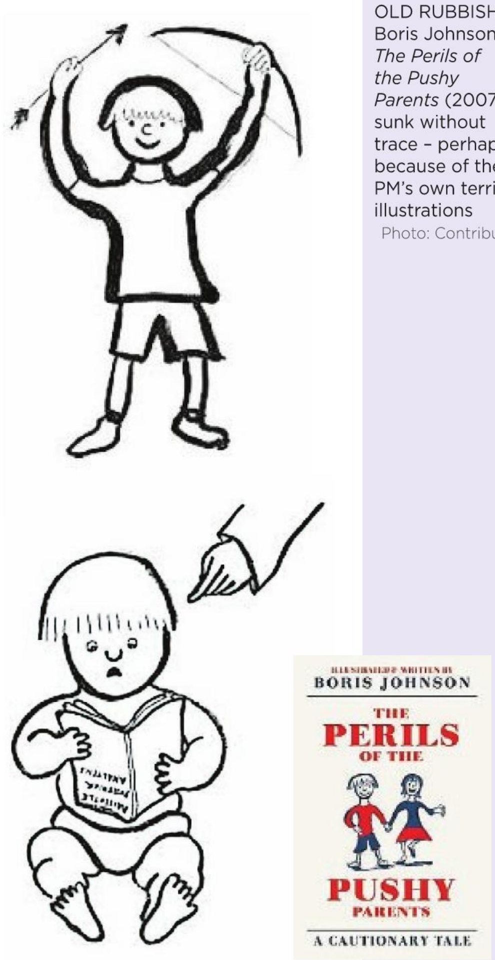
Where Belloc used bad rhymes to elicit a grin and a groan, Boris uses them to show off ("When they were babies in the womb/He'd read them Berkeley, Locke and Hume… He'd zap the programme off and holler/ 'Go and read some Emile Zola'").

The whole thing quickly peters out towards the conclusion that a little learning is just enough, though there is the unexpectedly self-aware couplet "The source, my friends, of half life's trouble/ Is seeking reputation's bubble".

The best thing that can be said for this book is its brevity. While a typical novel might run to between 80,000-100,000 words, here the text is condensed into 48 pages of around 100 words each. For this, the publishers were asking £10.

Johnson might not have had much to say in *The Perils of the Pushy Parents*, but that price point alone speaks volumes about the arrogance of a man who thinks he can serve up any old rubbish to the British people and they will buy it.

In 2007, they didn't. In 2020, it would probably be a best-seller.



OLD RUBBISH: Boris Johnson's *The Perils of the Pushy Parents* (2007) sunk without trace – perhaps because of the PM's own terrible illustrations

Photo: Contributed

STEVE'S SELECTION

ALLISON PEARSON

The *Telegraph* columnist and self-styled "humble handmaiden of Brexit" (as she told a pre-lockdown Leavers' rally) has established herself as one of the shrillest and daftest voices for ending the lockdown. When Monday May 4 brought news of 288 fatalities, she tweeted: "Remember 450 people die of cancer every day." Quite, but if we could stop 450 deaths by preventing people from standing next to one another, don't you think we'd have a go?

Pearson also drew giggles by tweeting a photo of what she had been told was a bonfire tribute to 100-year-old Colonel Tom Moore. It turned out to be the giant burning effigy poor Edward Woodward is sacrificed in during the final scenes of 1973's seminal horror film *The Wicker Man.*

CONOR BURNS

Boris Johnson's former aide has resigned as trade minister after misusing his office to intervene in a dispute over a loan owed to his father, warning on Commons-headed notepaper "that my role in the public eye could well attract interest especially if I were to use parliamentary privilege to raise the case".

Brexiteer watchers might recall that while he was working for BoJo in 2017, Burns' Twitter account sent a series of aggressive messages to Michel Barnier demanding he publish the legal basis on which Britain needed to pay the so-called "divorce bill". Burns soon explained he had been hacked. The tweets called for Barnier to quote the correct "treaty obligations and directives" – just Burns' luck to have been hacked by someone with detailed knowledge of EU law!

DANIEL KAWCZYNSKI

Last year the Shropshire MP was ranting about "MPs wishing to overturn the will of the British people" but now he seems willing to overturn the will of the Welsh people as expressed at two referendums. Kawczynski tweeted that he "looked forward to the day when we return to one parliament and one policy for the whole United Kingdom", adding that the Welsh parliament was "a massive additional expense" and "just another layer of red tape". When the discrepancy between his view on Brexit and his view on the Senedd was pointed out, the tweets quickly disappeared. Public votes in 1997 and 2011 have backed devolution in Wales and as recently as March, a poll found 83% in favour of the Senedd while only 14% wanted to abolish it.

HYPOCRISY: Nigel Farage on his lockdown-breaking jaunt to Kent

Photo: Twitter

NIGEL FARAGE

The nicotine-stained man-frog blasted the "hypocrisy" of lockdown breakers just hours before police warned him over his 100-mile trip to Kent in search of illegal migrants – a jaunt which could only be classed as 'essential' if the person doing the classifying was the same one who came up with Waitrose's essentials range (featuring artichoke hearts, cambozola cheese and cappuccino-flavoured mousse). On Monday, Farage told listeners to his LBC show that he was sick of lockdown breakers "popping out for the day in absolutely huge numbers". He added: "It almost seems to me there's a bit of middle-class hypocrisy here. It's as if lockdown needs to stay but lockdown really is for everybody else and not me." Strange he's now upset about people having their freedom of movement taken away, isn't it?

EXPERTISE

THE BEEB IS BACK

Only a few months ago, the BBC was in the government's crosshairs. Now, says **MATTHEW D'ANCONA**, it has a new lease of life

CRITICAL HOUR: BBC headquarters at London's New Broadcasting House Photo: Getty Images

"Tony's not going anywhere – not just yet." So says a senior BBC executive of the corporation's director general, Lord Hall of Birkenhead. In January, after seven years in the top job, he announced that he would be leaving in the summer. And it is still Hall's plan to leave as soon as is practical, to take up the chairmanship of the National Gallery – ideally in the autumn.

But the context in which he decided to resign feels a lifetime ago. The interviews to select his successor have been postponed to next month, which means, given the pace at which BBC decisions are taken, that their identity will probably not be known until July at the earliest. Hall has no intention of hanging on for the sake of it, believing that the next DG will need a clear run to prepare for licence fee negotiations in 2022 and Charter renewal five years thereafter.

Nonetheless, he has made clear to Sir David Clementi, the chairman of the BBC Board, that he won't bail out while the nation is still in the grip of a pandemic – a crisis in which public service broadcasting has enjoyed a much-needed renaissance.

It would make no sense for him to do so, at such a critical hour in the corporation's history. Hall did not seek this particular swansong. But now it is his, he is not going to fall silent halfway through.

This is the story of five months in the life of the BBC, a 98-year-old institution that is loved by many and reviled by some. I spoke to more than a dozen senior figures at the corporation and inside the government, all of whom spoke on condition of anonymity.

They recounted a helter-skelter drama in which the BBC faced the possibility of extinction, was granted a reprieve – and now has an unexpected opportunity, born of national adversity, to renew itself and develop the resilience it will need in the harsh political, economic and media landscape of the post-coronavirus world; an opportunity, one should add, that is no less challenging than all that preceded it.

It was, more than one senior BBC source told me, like the media-political equivalent of the Cuban Missile Crisis. As soon as it became clear on the night of December 12 last year that Boris Johnson had destroyed the Labour Party, and secured an 80-seat Commons majority, there was no doubt that the corporation faced a challenge to its very future as the world's leading public service broadcaster.

Relations between the BBC and Conservative Party had been dire during the election campaign – Johnson's refusal to be interviewed by the ferociously forensic Andrew Neil becoming emblematic of a much broader feud. Only three days before the nation went to the polls, the prime minister said that he was "certainly looking" at the future of the licence fee – the compulsory £157.50 annual levy on all owners of a colour television and users of the BBC iPlayer digital platform.

* * *

For the Conservative Party, BBC-bashing had long been something close to a tribal ritual. Tories had often complained about the BBC's coverage of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the Falklands War, and – in 1986 – Kate Adie's reporting of the US bombing of Libya.

But this was not the normal static of Conservative grumbling. In the new populist playbook deployed by Johnson and his chief adviser, Dominic Cummings, the BBC was cast as the institutional expression of everything bad about Britain: it was – supposedly – the voice of the liberal elite, of metropolitan indifference to the nation outside London, of faddish political correctness and unpatriotic prissiness.

In particular, it was regarded by the PM and his gang of Vote Leave veterans – now at the apex of government – as structurally opposed to Brexit (even though, confusingly, many Remainers believed precisely the opposite, and accused the BBC of being the "Brexit Broadcasting Corporation").

So when the newly strengthened Johnson regime announced immediately after the election that it would be boycotting the BBC's flagship political radio programme, *Today*, it was clear to Hall and his senior news executives that the government's attacks were more than rhetorical red meat tossed to its electoral base.

There was also busy talk of decriminalising non-payment of the licence fee – a measure that, ministers knew, would cost the BBC dearly (an estimated £200 million a year if failure to pay did indeed become a civil debt rather than a criminal offence, and thus more complicated and time-consuming to enforce). On December 15, the Sunday after the general election, the then chief secretary to the Treasury told the BBC's own Andrew Marr that decriminalisation was "something the prime minister has said we will look at, and has instructed people to look at that".

Such a measure would entail lost revenue the corporation could ill afford. As it was, Fran Unsworth, the BBC's head of news, was preparing a package of painful savings that would involve 450 job losses and the axing of BBC Two's popular *Victoria Derbyshire* programme – the final phase of an £80m plan of cuts in her department.

The corporation was also facing the loss of £250m a year, as it assumed the burden of free licence fees to over-75s who claimed pension credit, after the government had decided to stop subsidising the fee for that older demographic.

Decriminalisation, in other words, would hurt the BBC financially at a particularly bad moment. It was also, in all probability, the thin end of the wedge – diluting, if not abolishing, the all-important principle that payment of the licence fee was compulsory. As a social signal, it would be a green light for evasion.

Johnson and Cummings were, it seemed, deadly serious in their determination to wage all-out war – as Donald Trump had – upon sections of the media they disliked, starting with the biggest target of them all.

▶ Turn to page 24

From page 23

Hall responded by convening a series of rolling meetings in December and January at New Broadcasting House with his top team and trusted advisers, to address what he now regarded as an existential crisis.

According to one source familiar with these discussions: “Fairly quickly, three main principles emerged. We would have to get out of the defensive position and say something a bit bolder – that if the BBC did not exist, you would still want to invent it. Second, that the algorithms driving streaming platforms were incapable of producing true public service broadcasting. And third that, whatever funding system was used, it had to be compulsory.”

This was the heart of the matter. If viewers could choose whether or not to subscribe to Sky, Netflix, Disney+ or Apple TV+, why should they be compelled by law to pay for the BBC by the so-called “television poll tax”? The answer is that, like all taxes – and it is a tax – the licence fee is mandatory because only compulsory levies can guarantee the services that ensure public sector excellence. This is why the health service is not funded by donations, and why schools rely upon the taxes we all pay.

“A voluntary subscription service would be something fundamentally different,” says the same source. “It would not generate anything like enough revenue [for us] to be recognisably the BBC, or have the capacity to take risks or subsidise a world-class independent news service. How many political correspondents does Netflix have? In that respect, this was a binary choice.”

* * *

In a *Financial Times* article on January 12 – an edited version of a speech to senior management – Hall launched his public campaign to fend off the attack by Number 10. “The universality of the licence fee guarantees our commitment to creativity and risk-taking,” he wrote. “Because we are funded by everyone, we must offer something outstanding for everyone. Far from growing less relevant in a digital age, this unique relationship with audiences has never been more necessary. How better to hardwire creative ambition into what we do in today’s media landscape?”

As one senior BBC editor puts it, the silence was deafening. “I wasn’t sure if the *FT* piece was a mistake. I thought it might just have riled them up in Number 10 even more. Anyway, at that point, I was pretty sure we were buggered – as close as it gets to oblivion.”

The government’s public response – unofficial, but still a thunderbolt – was delivered more than a month later in the *Sunday Times* of February 16. Under the headline “No 10 tells BBC licence fee will be scrapped”, the paper’s well-connected political editor, Tim Shipman, reported that the government was now hell-bent on imposing a subscription model and compelling the BBC to downsize its operations radically.

Shipman quoted “a senior source” – generally assumed to be Cummings – insisting that “we are not bluffing on the licence fee. We are having a consultation and we will whack it”. The message was unambiguous and received accordingly. The very existence of the BBC as presently understood was now in play.

Enter, unexpectedly, a most unlikely saviour figure in the form of John Whittingdale, a former culture secretary now restored to his old department as a minister of state. ‘Whitto’ was regarded with a degree of suspicion in New Broadcasting House: a diehard Thatcherite who had served as the Iron Lady’s private secretary, he had no instinctive fondness for the BBC.

But he also knew what was possible in government, and what was not. As he explained to Number 10 after the *Sunday Times* story broke, what was being proposed was not only seriously impractical; it was also electoral madness.

* * *

More than 18 million households use Freeview, the digital terrestrial platform that delivers 70 television channels, including the main BBC services, at no additional charge. The ‘Whittingdale Objection’, as it became known, was as follows: since Freeview does not have the technological capability to withhold BBC channels from non-subscribers, it would have to be switched off entirely under the Cummings proposals; effectively denying many millions of families access to television.

Once he grasped this, the PM saw immediately that the subscription option was, in fact, a political non-starter. The *Times* was briefed accordingly, and reported the climbdown on February 18 as a split between Johnson and Cummings – with the PM having come down on the side of “reform rather than revolution”.

After only 48 hours, the subscription model had been kicked squarely into the long grass. “I think the other guy just blinked,” one of Hall’s friends texted him. “I think that’s right!” the DG replied.

On the night of the *Times* story, Whittingdale regaled guests at the Brit Awards, held at the O2 Arena, with this unlikely tale of the Thatcherite-who-saved-the-BBC. “I used to be called a headbanger,” he declared, as Stormzy took to the stage. “But these days I seem to be one of the moderates!”

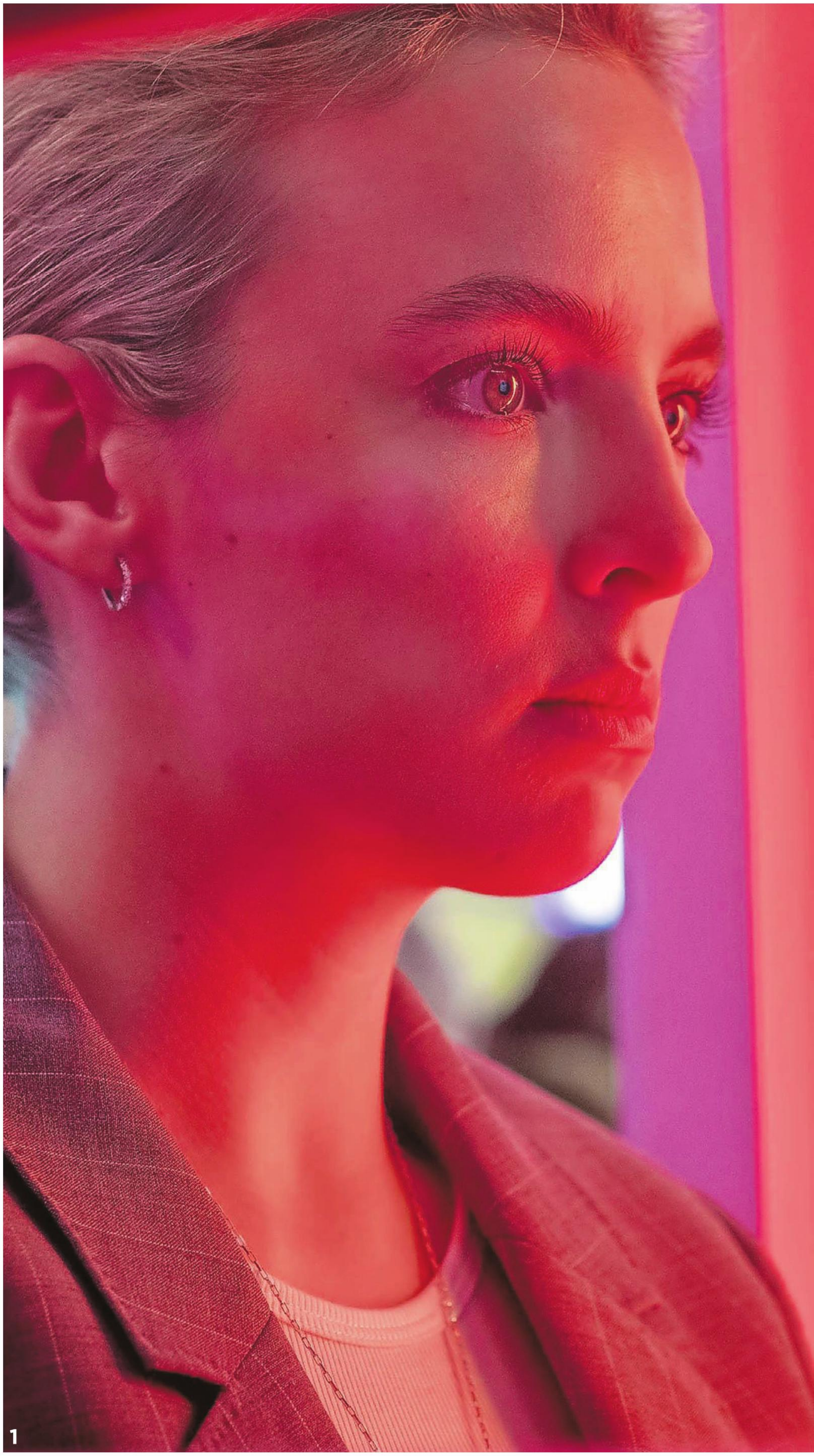
Reasonably content that the threat had been staved off, Hall resumed his departure plans. He had been brought in, in 2013, to steady the listing ship after the Jimmy Savile scandal, in which the BBC had been accused of turning a blind eye to the late entertainer’s serial sexual offences, many involving minors. (Hall succeeded George Entwistle, who held the post for only 54 days).

Now – with some unexpected help from Whittingdale – he had averted the greatest political challenge to the corporation since Greg Dyke and Gavyn Davies, then DG and chairman, were forced to resign in 2004 after the Hutton Inquiry into the death of Dr David Kelly and the BBC’s coverage of the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction threat. The final chapter of Hall’s long career at the BBC had been written, and it was time to sign off.

Or so it seemed.

* * *

The latter weeks of February were a period of painful recognition and febrile speculation. The full implications of Fran Unsworth’s savings plan were becoming bleakly apparent: redundancies, reduced spending on investigative journalism, fewer stories and more sharing of resources across multiple outlets. Underpinning her calculations was the



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DRAMATIC TIMES:
1 Jodie Comer in the BBC's smash hit drama *Killing Eve*. The opening episode of series three of the psychosexual thriller achieved 2.8 million streaming requests on iPlayer
Photo: BBC

2 BBC staff sleep on mattresses in the Concert Hall in the basement of Broadcasting House during the Second World War
Photo: BBC

3 Dominic Cummings is believed to be the senior source who in February told the *Sunday Times* that the government would press ahead with plans to axe the BBC licence fee
Photo: Getty Images

anxiety that under-35s were simply not turning to the BBC as their default news provider; and this generational shift represented a clear and present danger to the Beeb's claim to be a public service broadcaster with universal appeal. Even as she made cuts, Unsworth would also need to adapt radically, reshaping the BBC's news programming for the digital era and a culture in which social media was becoming the principal portal to all forms of consumption.

Meanwhile, the armchair bookies of New Broadcasting House argued furiously in the Caffè Nero just by its main entrance about the likely identity of Hall's successor. Clementi and his fellow board members had let it be known that they wanted a "street fighter" who would keep the BBC on the front foot – and there was no shortage of potential contenders.

James Purnell, the former Labour culture secretary, now director of BBC radio and education, had surprised many by ruling himself out of the race. But there were plenty of other names in the field: Alex Mahon, the first female chief executive of Channel 4; Jay Hunt, Apple's creative director for TV in Europe, and a former controller of BBC One; Elisabeth Murdoch, daughter of Rupert and a successful media entrepreneur in her own right (but she quickly dismissed rumours that she was in the running).

More solid seemed to be the speculation that Tim Davie, head of BBC Studios, and Charlotte Moore, BBC director of content and controller of BBC One, were in serious contention for the top job.

The lowest point of Hall's tenure had been the row over the gender pay gap in 2017 – during which it had emerged that two-thirds of the top presenters earning more than £150,000 and all of the top seven earners were male.

At the very least, this backdrop strengthened the case for the BBC to appoint its first woman DG. "If not now, when?" as one of its best-known presenters put it to me.

* * *

In early 2020, the coronavirus epidemic in Wuhan was largely a matter for the news operation, which, in common with all global media organisations, struggled to squeeze accurate data from the Chinese propaganda machine.

"There was a certain amount of low-level contingency planning around what it might mean for us and how we worked if the thing hit Britain," according to one senior editor. "But, to be honest, it felt fairly unreal and distant for most of February – just another big story we had to cover."

By early March, however, it was clear that the pathogen was much more than a lead item on the *Today* programme. On March 5, the first death in the UK from Covid-19 – a woman in her seventies who died at the Royal Berkshire hospital in Reading – was made public (it is now clear there were earlier fatalities, only subsequently disclosed).

Six days later, the World Health Organisation declared the outbreak a pandemic, and the UK government raised the official risk level to 'high'. By Friday March 13, Number 10 was preparing to ditch its 'herd immunity' strategy – whereby the contagion would be allowed to spread through the population, while the elderly and vulnerable were 'cocooned' – in favour of restrictive measures across the board.

Though Johnson did not announce the full lockdown until March 23, it was now clear that the BBC would have to adapt to a dramatically new context – and fast. "First, it was a question of: how do we work and keep the machine ticking over," says one board member. "Then it was the bigger issue – what is our role in all this? Is this a wartime situation, only without guns?"

In his history of the BBC during the Second World War, *Auntie's War*, Edward Stourton recounts the energy and camaraderie with which the corporation rose to the challenge posed by the conflict. During the Blitz, hundreds of staff slept in the Concert Hall in the basement of Broadcasting House, a makeshift curtain of blankets separating the sexes.

The pandemic, in contrast, would drive all but 7% of BBC staff from their offices and studios. Meetings would be held on Zoom. A core group of correspondents would remain in the field, designated as 'key workers', while TV news anchors and a skeleton production team would stay in the studio. But these were the exceptions. Even the *Today* programme's star presenters would broadcast from home. More than ever in its history, the BBC was no longer an office-bound bureaucracy, or an army of querulous journalists – but an idea.

But what, at heart, was that idea? On March 18, Hall announced a new programme schedule to meet the needs of the crisis. He explicitly echoed Lord Reith's doctrine that the BBC's task during the crisis was to "inform, educate and entertain" – but also to recognise that these are "unprecedented times".

There would be a more focused news operation, offering regular updates on the health crisis; 'Culture in Quarantine', curating virtual tours of exhibitions closed to the public, new poetry, plays, readings, and musical performances; virtual church services; a radical enhancement of BBC Bitesize, the corporation's education service, to help parents and pupils with homeschooling; the addition of classic and popular TV series 'box sets' to iPlayer to help stave off the boredom of lockdown; and exercise routines for all ages and fitness levels, supported by the Health Check UK Live service.

The message was one of unvarnished public solidarity. "We need to pull together to get through this," said Hall. "It will take time to emerge from the challenges we all face, but the BBC will be there for the public all the way through this."

The clarity of this mission undoubtedly boosted morale within the Beeb after so many years of political attrition, controversy, organisational disruption and financial pressure. "Normally, we'd have had some expensive management consultants in to talk about any of these projects," as one member of the BBC's executive committee puts it. "And it would have taken a year to set up. In this case, we had no option but to turn on a dime – and we did. It was the broadcasting equivalent of building a Nightingale Hospital in nine days."

Nestling within this sense of collective purpose, however, was a thorny question: how to pursue this role, nurturing national solidarity and responding to a pressing social need, without becoming the propaganda wing of the government? In the first days of the lockdown, some

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EXPERTISE

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programme editors grumbled that they felt pressured – by implication, but clearly enough – not to be unreasonably tough on ministers grappling with a historic health crisis.

"My feeling from the start was: 'f**k that'," says one senior producer. "There's going to be a big official inquiry into how coronavirus was handled by the government. Why not start it now in our coverage?"

★ ★ ★

In fairness, Laura Kuenssberg, the BBC's political editor, and Hugh Pym, its health editor, can scarcely be accused of giving cabinet ministers an easy ride at the daily Downing Street briefings. And, on Wednesday April 8, Emily Maitlis delivered a blistering monologue on *Newsnight* that put paid to any notion that the Beeb was pulling its punches or compromising its journalistic covenant.

Maitlis, lead presenter on the late-night news programme, writes her scripts at home. She had grown increasingly irritated by 'ministersplaining' of the crisis, particularly the insistence that the virus was a great leveller.

"The disease is not a great leveller, the consequences of which everyone – rich or poor – suffers the same," she said at the top of the programme. "This is a myth which needs debunking. Those on the front line right now – bus drivers and shelf stackers, nurses, care home workers, hospital staff and shop keepers – are disproportionately the lowest paid members of our workforce. They are more likely to catch the disease because they are more exposed.

Sir Robbie Gibb, Theresa May's former communications chief, texted the programme's editor, Esmé Wren, at 5am to complain about its alleged bias. Then again, a rival broadcaster, referring to the legendary US television and radio host, says: "It was a sort of Edward R. Murrow moment."

★ ★ ★

"So that's all good then." The magnificent platitude made famous by actor Hugh Bonneville's character, Ian Fletcher – the BBC's 'Head of Values' in the BBC Two comedy *W1A* – resonated because it captured the worst side of managerial complacency in New Broadcasting House.

Were Fletcher ambling through its corridors today – wearing a mask and observing social distance, of course – would he be tempted to wheel it out again?

The Beeb's own statistics suggest that it has performed very well during the pandemic. The performance of news bulletins has been especially strong – the *Six O'Clock News*, carrying reports of the daily Number 10 briefings, has had a steady audience of around 4.1 million viewers, up 85% on the 2019 average.

Overall, the BBC's viewing figures are up by 44% year-on-year, and – a real demographic prize – by 67% among 16- to 34-year-olds. The fear that Generation Z and younger millennials might never turn to the Beeb as a primary source of news and entertainment has receded, at least for now.

BBC local radio – which had already risen to the occasion during the floods between November and February – is also enjoying a revival. The Make a Difference campaign, through which local communities can share their tips and stories of life in lockdown, has already attracted more than 400,000 calls and messages.

The new Bitesize education service drew 8.7 million users in its first four days. Monday March 23 was iPlayer's most popular day ever, with a record 20.4 million requests to stream programmes on the service – many of them downloading the PM's statement announcing the lockdown.

The list goes on. Less than three months ago, the BBC was facing what amounted to an extinction-level event: the end of the licence fee and the imposition of a subscription model. Now it is riding high, adapting the Reithian mission to the digital age.

Relations between senior management and cabinet ministers such as the culture secretary, Oliver Dowden, and the education secretary, Gavin Williamson, have grown markedly warmer. "It's gone from whack to cherish," as one member of the corporation's executive committee puts it.

"Before all this started, the BBC was under assault, apparently because of its independence," wrote the novelist Nick Hornby in a Penguin essay published last week. "But heaven help the politicians who try to cut anything anywhere in the NHS. I would like to think that the BBC's service, its calm intelligence and dedication to our health and our ability to cope with what 2020 has thrown at us, might make it similarly untouchable, and give those who wish it harm pause for thought."

There is something in this. Before Christmas, Hall was attracted by the ideas of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, and his emphasis upon the 'public sphere'. What the BBC had to evangelise was its unique role in nurturing the connective tissue, creativity and public ethos of the society it served. What the DG and his team could not have predicted was how quickly, and in what extraordinary circumstances, it would have the opportunity to communicate this message – by showing rather than telling.

That said, Hornby overstates the case. The BBC remains much more politically divisive than the NHS and is certainly not "impregnable". For a start, it faces a much broader range of competitors: no giant, private health provider yet challenges the NHS as Netflix, Amazon Prime and Disney+ do the BBC. Auntie enhances many lives but – with the exception of its charitable endeavours – it does not save them.

Meanwhile, its competitors are forging ahead. Disney+ has racked up 50 million subscribers in five months. Netflix has prospered during the pandemic, signing up almost 16 million new account-holders in the first three months of the year. Its gonzo genre-busting series *Tiger King* – in which true crime meets big cats meets crazed soap opera – has reached an estimated 64 million households around the world. Apple is rumoured to be wargaming a potential buy-out of Netflix.

The BBC's response is that it is producing much higher-quality productions and still reaching audiences at scale. In its first week alone, the first episode of series three of *Killing Eve* – the psychosexual thriller initially scripted by Phoebe Waller-Bridge – achieved 2.8 million streaming requests on iPlayer. To date, the first two seasons of this twisty, eccentric and hugely imaginative drama

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NATIONAL TREASURE:
1 Children In Need and Comic Relief joined forces for *The Big Night In* charity fundraiser in April
Photo: BBC

2 CBBC presenter Katie Thistleton hosts the BBC Bitesize virtual learning programme
Photo: BBC

3 Presenter Emily Maitlis delivers her *Newsnight* monologue on April 8
Photo: BBC

4 Daisy Edgar Jones and Paul Mescal in new BBC drama *Normal People*
Photo: BBC

have scored 110 million requests to stream. Early indications are that Lenny Abrahamson and Hettie Macdonald's *Normal People* – adapted from Sally Rooney's cerebral novel – will be a comparable success.

* * *

What is new is that, in the digital age of proliferating global competitors, the BBC has to make a lot more noise about such successes. "It's not like the days of *I, Claudius* or *Smiley's People*, when basically we were the only broadcaster in the world making world-class drama," says one production source. "We have to win our mandate again and again, never be complacent. And that means learning new habits, being more aggressive. Part of that is as simple as reminding people that, when they stream *Peaky Blinders* or *Luther* on Netflix, they are watching BBC-made content. But it also means saying, more explicitly than we do, that there is stuff, especially news, that nobody does as well as we do – and lots of platforms don't do at all."

This is true – but it also poses questions that the BBC will have to answer in the post-lockdown world. One is the objection of many in the business community that the Beeb has presented the crisis as almost exclusively a story about the NHS and Westminster – public health and politics – with much too little attention paid to the colossal economic pressures that have already forced millions into unemployment, threatened thousands of firms with bankruptcy and driven four million furloughed employees onto the government payroll.

In response to this charge, BBC sources say that there has been extensive coverage of these themes in its bulletins and news magazine programmes. But – given the unique financial security that the licence fee confers – the corporation can expect a considerable degree of resentment from the struggling private sector in the months and years ahead.

There is undoubtedly a sense amongst businesspeople that the scale of the economic nightmare ahead is lost on a broadcasting giant that receives its funding through a criminally-enforceable public tax, and feels comfortable talking to multinationals but much less so (except on a token basis) to small- and medium-sized businesses. This head of steam will be a clear and present danger for the new DG.

Already, there is an informal internal review underway of what the lessons of the lockdown should be. "We had no idea how successful the education and cultural stuff we turned out – in a tearing hurry – would be," says one senior source. "But obviously we've tapped into something, which is about the BBC being a sort of national meeting place, as well as a first responder in a crisis. We'd be crazy not to carry on doing that sort of stuff, but obviously the context will be different. It's a good problem to have, but a daunting one."

In spite of its recent successes, the BBC also faces an inquiry by the Commons' Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee (chaired by the hardline Tory MP Julian Knight), which will look at all aspects of its future, including funding models. The threat of decriminalisation has not receded completely – though it is hoped at New Broadcasting House that BBC-baiting will be low on ministers' agendas as they exit lockdown to salvage the UK economy.

More to the point, the wiser heads at the apex of the Beeb know that the licence fee in its present form has had its day. The television was the 'convergence device' of the last century: the technology to which all roads led. But that has long since ceased to be the case.

The convergence device of 2020 is the smartphone, followed closely by the laptop. As the 'Internet of Things' evolves, everything will be a potential screen. The very idea of owning a television will become quaint – and an untenable basis for imposing a compulsory level to fund public service broadcasting.

* * *

"The future is probably some sort of household charge – possibly based on utility bills, or council tax bands," says one source involved with future planning of the BBC's funding. "It should be progressive, too. The old flat charge doesn't work when so many people are living longer and, in many cases, are considerably more affluent than the young. The only absolutely non-negotiable point is that the fee, or whatever you call it, has to be compulsory."

The licence fee raises slightly less than £3.7 billion a year. Whatever form the levy takes in the future, the BBC's financial planners know they will be lucky to secure a real-terms increase in 2022.

Hence, the gathering consensus within New Broadcasting House that the new funding model needs to be progressive – the wealthier will pay more – not least to resolve once and for all the vexed question of licence fees for the over-75s (the government's withdrawal of subsidy for this category left the BBC with a potential shortfall of £745m a year by 2021/22 – equivalent to a fifth of its funding).

Already, it expects to lose £125m of commercial and licence fee revenue during this pandemic. "Some organisations and businesses will be considered too big to fail and be bailed out if things get really tough," says the same source. "Not us."

So one of the main challenges for the new DG will be to pursue new revenue streams, and aggressively so. This is expected to include premium levels of charging for exclusive content on iPlayer, more co-productions with big global studios, and the development of a new market in BBC education services around the world.

To survive and prosper, the Beeb must cease to be an institution – with all its encumbrances – and seek to become, so to speak, the best app in the world.

So: is it all good then? Much better, certainly, than it was five months ago.

The BBC has lived through a near-death experience and shown its mettle at a time of national crisis. It is undeniably back in the game. The question is whether its new custodians grasp quite how pitilessly hard that game is about to become.

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Tortoise

BRITANNIA UNHINGED

A decade ago, a handful of new Tory MPs wrote a book outlining their criticisms of the country and vision for how to improve it. Now they are in senior roles, putting their proposals into action. **SUNA ERDEM** revisits the original, troubling tome

Behold the taxi driver from central casting. He keeps his car clean and works 60 hours a week. Proud and patriotic, he loves the Queen, Margaret Thatcher and Lord Sugar. He is contemptuous of "lazy, feckless, benefits cheats", "talentless celebrities", public sector pensions and green taxes.

"You've probably guessed, I'm no socialist… I believe in a work ethic… not a great one for the Nanny State. I think where we've got to in helping people is over the top."

This unnamed 'everydriver' – a composite from a wide survey of fellow cabbies – is the kind of old-fashioned, no-nonsense grafter beloved of middling soaps and hackneyed social analyses.

He is presented as a model character in *Britannia Unchained*, a self-declared optimistic tome setting out how Britain could improve its lot, written by five rookie Conservative MPs in the early years of David Cameron's government.

But why should we care? This is an old book from old times – before coronavirus, before Brexit, before, even, single-party Conservative rule.

Those glory days where the front pages were graced by Pippa Middleton's bottom and Boris Johnson dangling on a zipwire. Why would the musings of a handful of inexperienced MPs be of any interest?

Well, they are, because Dominic Raab is now foreign secretary, called in to take the reins of government during prime minister Boris Johnson's illness; Priti Patel is home secretary; Liz Truss is the international trade secretary and longest-serving member of the cabinet; Kwasi Kwarteng is a business minister; and Chris Skidmore a former education minister.

Among those inspired by ideas contained within the book is Rishi Sunak, an even newer MP (2015) who before his astonishingly quick elevation to the job of coronavirus-bashing chancellor vocally championed at least one idea pushed by the publication – the controversial tax- and regulation-lite freeports.

These MPs, whose ideal citizen includes a cheerfully overworked, right-wing taxi driver on an uncertain income, are now at the helm of a country going through the biggest peacetime crisis in living memory.

They represent the libertarian-style thinking that seems to have become the norm at the top of the government. The vision they have for Britain matters, and so it seems like a good time to revisit the book in which they set this out.

All I can say is that it doesn't withstand much scrutiny.

The premise of the thin volume is to outline the lessons that can be learned from international attitudes to work, financial structures and prosperity in order to enhance the prospects of Great Britain and stem an "inevitable slide into mediocrity". There is a good book to be written about that. This isn't it.

From the start, the writers' uncompromising, dare I say simplistic good-versus-evil attitude permeates the text. The opening pages present us with Ashraf Rossli – a Malaysian accountancy student who was badly assaulted during the 2011 London riots but later said that he still thought Britain was fantastic (we like) – versus his 17-year-old assailant Beau Isagba, who punched him and stole his bike, and had previous for possessing a knife at 14 and cannabis at 16 (we definitely don't like).

All of modern Britain's ills are laid at the feet of Isagba who was imprisoned for seven years and whose early life and the context of his path to crime is not examined. He is just bad: "Sadly, Beau Isagba represents the worst of what some elements of Britain have become."

Later comes Tuggy Tug, a young gang leader from Brixton, very much in the Isagba mould, pitched against Jessie Tang, a British-Chinese A-level student with high academic ambitions. And so the narrative goes on – blinkered, self-satisfied, dismissive, full of clichés.

The general premise is that the Britain of the early 2010s was in a terrible crisis, mostly, it seems, because this was no longer the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher. What with its welfare-driven "dependency culture", "bloated" economic structures – somewhat incredibly put on a par with southern Europe – terrible education, idle population and lack of imaginative risk-taking, the country that was about to enjoy those heady days around the London Olympics was accorded a loss of confidence that could only be solved by removing the chains holding it back.

The remedies can be found in a highly selective tour of countries and issues: Canada's prudent deficit reduction, which insulated it during the global financial crisis; the constantly working Singaporean children's mathematical prowess; optimistic risk-taking in Brazil; the perceived competitive advantages of regulation-hating Australia; Silicon Valley's love of instructive failure; the "chutzpah" of Israeli techies and investors; with STEM education as the answer to everything.

Written and published before the EU referendum debate proper had begun, *Britannia Unchained* has little time for Europe, but the authors became Brexiteers, and the language of Leavers peppers the pages.

So, red tape – bad, hard working Asians – good; health and safety – bad, risk-taking and entrepreneurs – good. Bureaucracy is always "bloated" or "entrenched"; Brits are lazy, apart from the City, Silicon roundabout, and salt-of-the-earth cabbies. We are invited to admire buccaneers, essentially pirates, and even – oh, go on, it's a guilty pleasure – the enterprising black market and the American Frontier Spirit. Typical words and phrases include "primordial", "raw", "the purest level of entrepreneurialism untouched by law, regulation or tax", and again, "freedom from regulation or tax".

Chapter One, "The Chains", does the job of 'talking down the country' much more effectively than any so-called Remoaner. We are reminded that Britain "once ruled the empire on which the sun never set", but that today, its parlous state is comparable to the 1970s – Winter of Discontent, IMF loan etc. Because of laziness, a lack of pizazz and a feeble need for welfare, greater bureaucracy and a propensity to question economic gospel on markets and growth, we are falling behind emerging markets which, throughout the book, are presented with a rose-tinted view that ignores more than it notices.

Nevertheless, "for much of the post-war era, there has been a damaging belief that economic growth is not really determined by effort," we are told. We just have to get on our bikes and try harder.

Chapter Two, "A Tale of Two Nations", by way of trashing Britain's economy under New Labour, recounts how Canada reduced its financial deficit to make the country more resilient. This included firing civil servants, reducing the rates and eligibility for unemployment insurance and a 50% slashing of spending on transport.

UNCHAINED GANG: From left, Liz Truss, Dominic Raab, Chris Skidmore, Kwasi Kwarteng and Priti Patel

Photos: Getty Images

The next chapter, "The Revenge of the Geeks", takes on the pre-Gove/Cummings education establishment and is a paean to the marvels of science education. Arguing that British students are too idle for hard subjects, it goes on to trash not just the dreaded media studies, but anything, really, that isn't science (or maths).

The implication being that anyone with intelligence and drive would study the sciences and that subjects such as history, languages, English and classics are for the dim or indolent. Degree subjects taken by the authors include classics, history and politics, while none has a maths or science degree. But contradiction and double standards do not seem to trouble anyone here.

Crammers and burnout-level studying are routinely praised. "(In South Korea) Many students go straight from long days at school to studying all evening and weekend. In Seoul, as much as 16% of the family's income is spent on private tuition on top of the state education system." British parents are "unwilling" to fund extra study and at university, their children feel no need to study hard either, preferring the pub and lie-ins.

The authors predictably highlight the pushy 'Tiger Mother' attitude, which rather demonstrates that perhaps they – like many commentators at the time – didn't really read Amy Chua's book properly. Yes, she pursued an uncompromisingly ambitious educational plan for her children and noted that in the West parents didn't have such high expectations of their offspring.

However, after an unsettling rebellion by her younger daughter, Chua detailed how she had to learn to compromise. Similarly, the Chinese pianist Lang Lang, known as much for his tough childhood with a pushy father as his musical talents, maintains success can be achieved in gentler ways.

As Chinese parents are exposed increasingly to other cultures, they often change their thinking – many send their children to school in the UK for a less rigid, more rounded education. And for those readers looking at how and why people from certain cultures achieve success, another Amy Chua book, *The Triple Package*, is a much more comprehensive and thoughtful choice.

The idea of lazy, feckless students segues neatly into Chapter 4, where we meet lazy, feckless adults. This chapter has an intro that is so bad it reads like an example of 'how not to write an intro', and includes our cabbie, pitted against those puffed up Tube drivers who dare to have salaries and join unions.

The whole section reads like Rod Liddle rant. Here we find many of the quotes that made the headlines during the book's original publication. Eg: "Once they enter the workplace, the British are among the worst idlers of the world."

On the issue of work ethic, there is an off-key, condescending quote about how Brazilians' love of dancing and football makes them softer workers than the Chinese by the chief executive of Foxconn, the Taiwanese maker of iPads and iPhones. That's Foxconn, part of Apple's controversial supply chain, which, according to reports, had to put literal safety nets around its factories to catch potential suicides after a spate of self-inflicted deaths by young men working themselves to the bone in near slave conditions.

As elsewhere, the authors might be looking, but are they seeing? Where is the depth? Where is the analysis? Might the cabbie be working 60 hours a week because he isn't paid enough for a more sensible workload. Could this in the long run make him ill and a burden on the state? Who knows? And no doubt, a few years after this article, Mr Cabbie would be sidelined by Uber, whose drivers face even less certain work without the benefit of The Knowledge and its relatively improved pay. And are the free-market authors oblivious of the fact that it is the libertarians who celebrate these hard working characters who are more likely to endorse the risk-taking and innovation that leads to cheap, less regulated Uber against black cabs and later encourage driverless cars versus Uber drivers?

As you progress through the book, the countries used as examples are starting to look like a map of the locations in *McMafia* – India, Brazil, Israel. Places where issues such as poverty, the lack of a safety net, relative international isolation, corruption and crime combine variously with the influence of international spivs and wide boys to create a flourishing black economy, crime and exploitative work conditions.

We are shown how people set up businesses from favelas or slums – some of them legal. Similar rags to riches stories in the book are piled on to supposedly justify deregulation and Darwinian competition.

There is no sense that there might be other conclusions. Yet, to pick the example of one media heroine from the present pandemic: Rosena Allin-Khan, the Cambridge-educated medic whose father was a Pakistani TV repairman and whose Polish mother worked in a garage and as a cleaner, clearly thought differently or she would not have become a Labour MP.

Since this book was written nearly 10 years ago, it could be that it is in essence mere juvenilia. Have the writers become more rigorous and pragmatic with time? Yet to look at attitudes and pronouncements today, it seems that the spirit of *Britannia Unchained* has shifted from niche to mainstream. Including the slipshod attitude to knowledge, facts and rules.

You can see this reflected in Priti Patel's uncompromising, black-and-white stance towards the punishment of criminals. You can see it in her reductive points-based immigration plans; in her erroneous claim that EU workers could be replaced by 8.5 million economically inactive Britons (fact-checkers quickly revealed that a vast majority of these comprised students, the sick, family carers, retirees, those awaiting job application results or in no need of a job); her reportedly brash attitude to staff, whom she allegedly derided as lazy and stupid; and the bullying allegations against her. It also lurks beneath Patel's apparent disdain for rules when she took on the freelance diplomacy while on holiday in Israel in 2017 that led to her forced resignation as international development secretary and accusations by Home Office sources that she encourages behaviour outside the rule of law.

It is evident, too, in the comments by Dominic Raab, as Brexit secretary, when he expressed surprise at the importance to trade of the Dover-Calais crossing. His disastrous, short tenure in that job was subsequently blasted by diplomats in Brussels as unhinged, inconsistent and naïve. In a cutting *Telegraph* article, EU sources criticised him as "pompous", "disinterested" and "unprepared", a "Darwinian disaster capitalist" with "stupid" negotiation tactics and a tendency for "dangerous flights of improvisation", quite unlike "the fully-briefed details man or tough negotiator meting out home truths to the EU he claims to be," the newspaper wrote.

Among the others, Kwasi Kwarteng has been accused by the legal profession of undermining the rule of law by implying that judges were biased. Liz Truss had to apologise last year for her department breaching several times a court order against arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

The easy , hollow slogans of "Take Back Control" and "Get Brexit Done", come from the soul of *Britannia Unchained*, even if they were not conjured up by its writers.

Boris Johnson's ideology appears more malleable than that of the five authors, but they have a lot of power in his government, and his creative view of facts and disinclination to study detail are well known. At the same time, the coronavirus crisis and Brexit have broken the bonds of the past and handed ministers unprecedented potential for innovation, as Britain makes her way forward in uncertain times.

In *Britannia Unchained*, much is made of Britain's need to break from its existing ways and forge a bright new future. But while the book does include admirable examples of fortitude, the writers are not really giving us a recipe for how Britain could emulate these – apart from general pluck – that doesn't involve grinding poverty, slave labour, cut-throat competition, war, or 'effective' authoritarians.

It all seems a bit rushed, and full of broad brush sweep, bravado, unsubstantiated statements (are Brits really working fewer hours than ever? Are school standards really at rock bottom compared to some halcyon past?) and clichés masquerading as sage observations. Were they – hush – not scientifically methodical enough to get everything straight first? They didn't – heaven forbid – sacrifice clear scientific evidence to slipshod ideology?

The ideas and methods of this book could drive the government for years to come. And that doesn't augur well. *Britannia Unchained* is not completely empty of content or ideas – these students of international economic driving forces have clearly skim-read the source matter. But it doesn't disguise the fact that they basically did their homework on the bus.

AMERICA'S PARTISAN PRISM IS FOCUSING HERE TOO

Mitch Benn

Comedian, Musician, Writer

There's a sort of numbness setting in now, isn't there? A hollow, aching, weary resignation punctuated by periods of gnawing dread (and perhaps searing grief) when the virus's crosshairs hover for too long over someone we love.

I myself, having last week watched my partner Leslie 'attend' the funeral of her beloved grandpa via video-link (see my column of two weeks ago), seem to have arrived at what I guess bereavement counsellors would call a preemptive version of the "bargaining" phase but which to an Orwell nerd like me feels more like the Room 101 "Do it to Julia" moment. Okay, whatever, but just not *my* mum, please? Not *my* mum.

And there's anger, too, of course. Anger is toxic at the best of times but Covid-19 anger is especially corrosive as it has nowhere to go; it just boils in the guts of the angry, there being no obvious target at which to spew it.

So it's inevitable that, almost as a psychological immune response, people are finding targets for that anger, even if they're having to stretch or bend the available facts in order to do so.

I'm sure you've all seen the (sometimes armed) protests by 'Covid-19 truthers' in the US over the last week or so, some of whom, as evinced by their (interestingly spelled) placards, simply refuse to believe that the virus exists. Either it's a front to disguise mass radiation poisoning by 5G masts or nothing's happening at all save for "crisis actors" pretending to die at the rate of two to three thousand a week.

But we limeys shouldn't watch this spectacle with any sense of smugness; '5G truthers' have been burning down cellphone towers in the UK (just the thing we need during lockdown, nice one boys) but we've yet to see the sort of mass rejection of reality we're observing in the States.

It may yet be coming; because the reality-deniers are the direct inheritors of the decision made in the US in the 1990s that TV news didn't actually have to be, well, *news* anymore.

You could still call it news, of course, but it was perfectly okay and ethical for a 'news' channel to consist entirely of propaganda, invective and weaponised confirmation bias because that's what people wanted.

There was more money – so much more money – to be made from telling people what they wanted to hear (that they were right, that they were correct to suspect and fear everything they suspected and feared and that they didn't ever need to examine their own actions or attitudes) than there was in telling people things that maybe they didn't want to hear, like, you know, facts and stuff.

This has led to a situation in which everything must be perceived through a partisan prism. Does something make our side look bad? Then it's a hoax, perpetrated by the other side! And while even president Trump stopped referring to the virus as a hoax a few weeks ago (although he did use those precise words relatively recently) his supporters, in great numbers, believe that since the virus is making Trump look bad, the virus itself is a liberal hoax.

But while our TV news is still fairly responsible – although the BBC is sliding back into the timidity in the face of authority which it so depressingly displayed during the Brexit fiasco (and while I'm here, bet you never thought you'd feel nostalgic for those days) – our newspapers are way worse for bias and recklessness than their American counterparts.

Pop: 12.8 mil
Cases: 32.284
= 0.0025%
Deaths: 1.112 (MAYBE?)
= 0.000086%
Trump 2020
TRUMP PENCE KEEP AMERICA GREAT! 2020
STOP THE SHUTDOWN NOW
STOP THE TYRANNY

IN DENIAL: Protestors take part in a demonstration against the coronavirus lockdown in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Photo: Getty Images

In particular, the apostolic levels of obsequiousness being shown to the prime minister by even the hitherto relatively sane end of the right-wing press is truly disturbing.

One can't help but suspect that the Tory press is canonising him in this fashion in order to shield him from criticism when this crisis abates (and, by extension, themselves, since Boris Johnson comes from their ranks and is, to a degree, their creation).

Now while I don't wish the PM ill, to trumpet his own recovery from the virus as "the nation restored", when we're burying hundreds of ordinary citizens a week, is at best tone deaf and at worst grotesquely insensitive.

And while I wish his new partner and baby nothing but the best (and if nothing else, you have to admire Carrie Symonds's optimism), presenting their new arrival as "the heartwarming story the country needed" strikes a similarly jarring tone.

That partisan prism which is so distorting American discourse is being polished up over here too.

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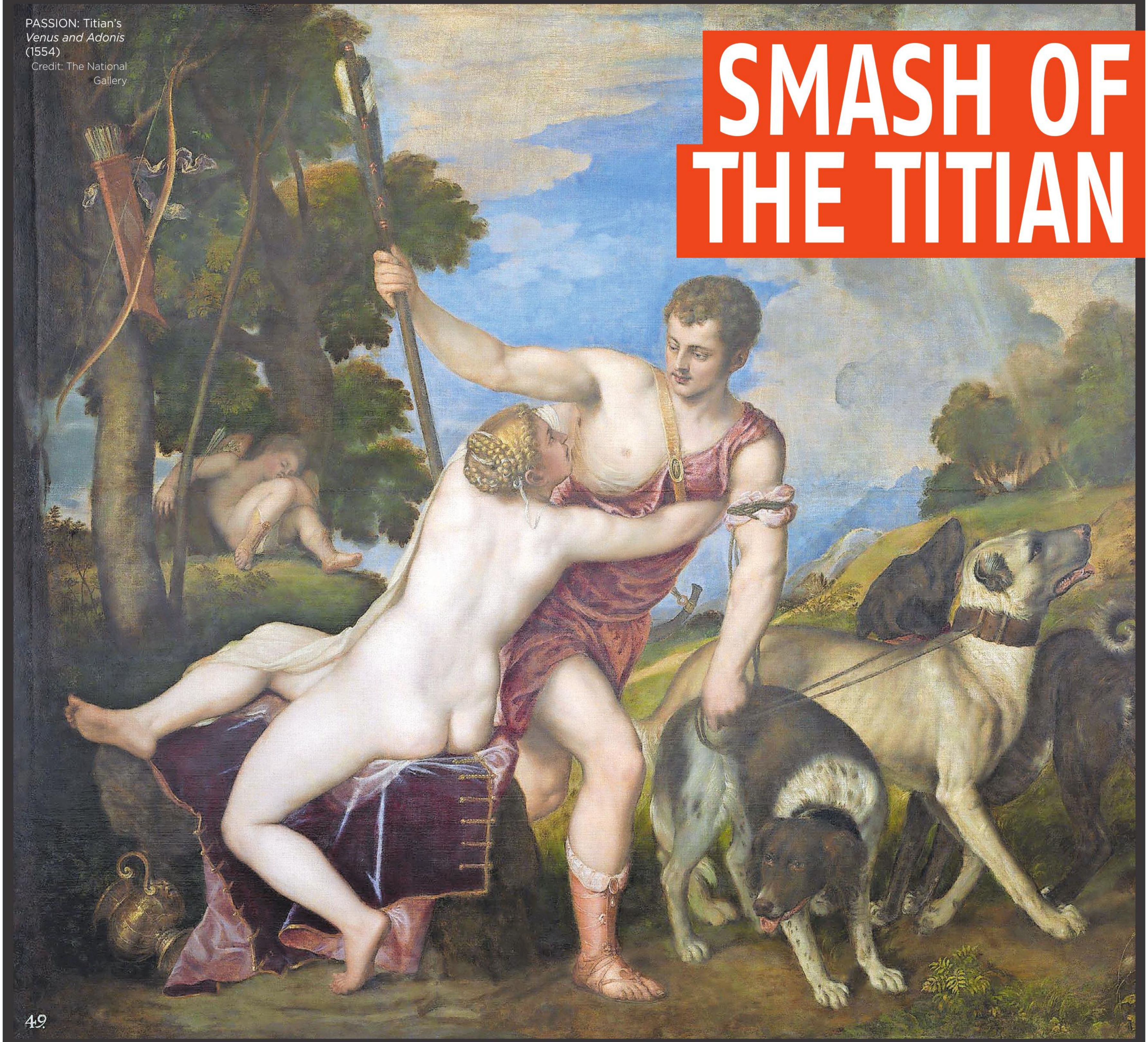
EUROFILE

SMASH OF THE TITIAN



PASSION: Titian's *Venus and Adonis* (1554)
Credit: The National Gallery

CLAUDIA PRITCHARD ON AN EPIC TITIAN BLOCKBUSTER EXHIBITION ALMOST 500 YEARS IN THE MAKING THAT WE WILL NOW HAVE TO WAIT A LITTLE LONGER FOR

The memo from the artist Titian to Philip II of Spain just before Christmas in 1574 is businesslike and ingratiating, and concludes with a list of paintings that he has sent to His Catholic Majesty over the past 25 years. It is not, he admits, a complete list, "as I cannot remember them all".

He cannot remember them all… Today – or, at least, up until March this year – art-lovers travel half way round the world to see a Titian.

Other artists revere him, centuries of scholars have studied him and gallery directors treasure his work if they are lucky enough to have one or more pieces in their collections.

Indeed, so awe-inspiring are the paintings, that a once-in-a-lifetime project to reunite six canvases at the National Gallery, cut short by measures against Covid-19, is nevertheless a landmark occasion.

And while visits to *Titian: Love Desire and Death* are suspended, a magnificent catalogue including such detail as Titian's beautifully written letters, is valuable homework. So, too, are lectures on each painting on the National Gallery's Facebook page, and a BBC documentary, *Titian Behind Closed Doors*.

The *Poesie* is a set of six paintings connected to but not solely inspired by the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. Each tells a succinct story of transformation, but also reveals the passions of the prince for whom they were created.

Female flesh and hunting were high on Philip's own list, and Titian, with his skill for flesh tints, dynamic compositions and vivid scene-setting was the man to cater to those tastes.

Titian – Tiziano Vecellio (c1490-1576) – was the leading artist of his day and court painter to Charles V of Spain when he first met the king's heir, Philip, in Milan in 1548.

The prince was on the grand tour through the Holy Roman Empire. Wily and adaptable, the painter had celebrated with paintings of political grandeur the reign of Charles, who knighted him.

In Philip, who would reign as Philip II of Spain from 1556 until 1598, he detected a man with more interest in aesthetics. Soon patron and artist were planning works together.

A fashion for cycles of paintings and tapestries had been forged at the beginning of the 16th century, and Titian, when younger and relatively unknown, had completed three Bacchanalian pictures for Alfonso d'Este, in Ferrara.

When he set about the six vast, square canvases for Philip, he envisaged again a single room for their display, but it is unclear where or whether they ever hung all together.

They were trundled around Philip's many palaces, some going to London after his brief marriage in 1554 to Mary Tudor that ended with her death four years later.

Changing hands over the centuries, they have been reunited over the same four walls for the first time, converging on London, which holds two of the six, at the Wallace Collection and Apsley House.

Two more sashay between London and Edinburgh, and a fifth is at the Prado in Spain.

But it is *The Rape of Europa*, which normally resides at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, Massachusetts, that is the least familiar

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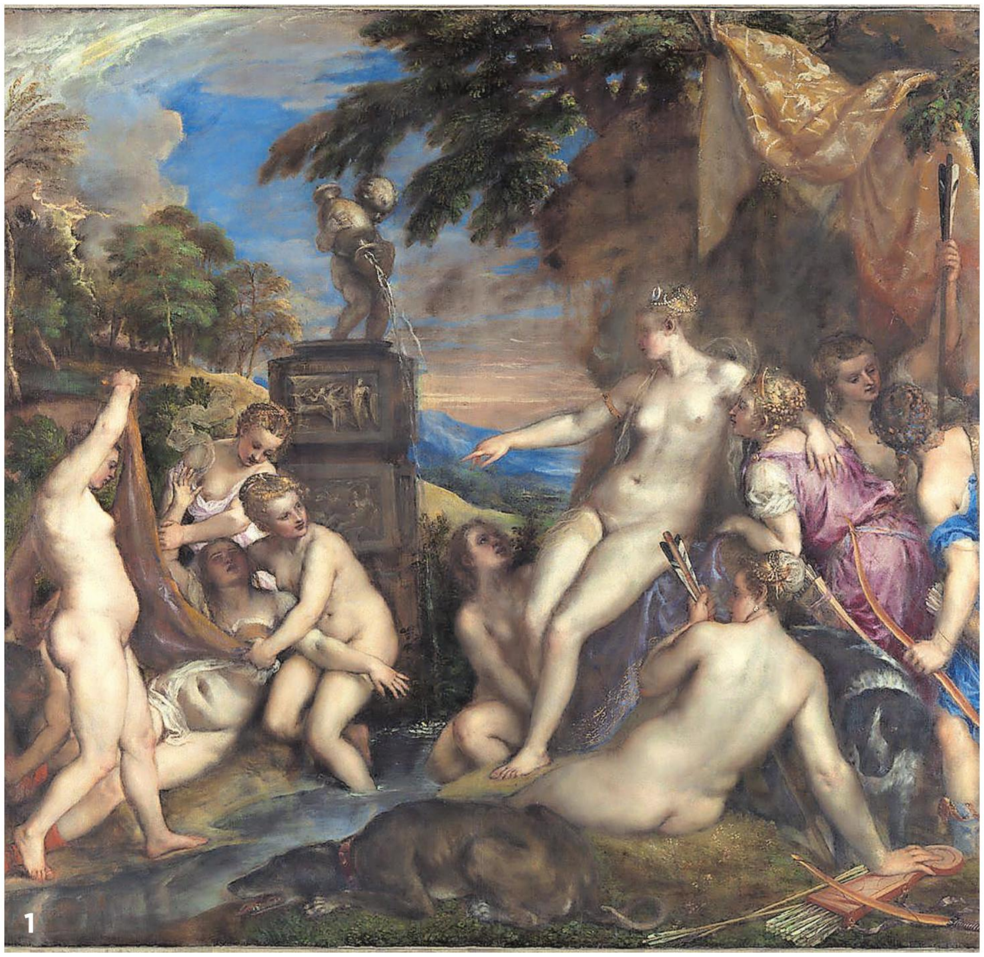
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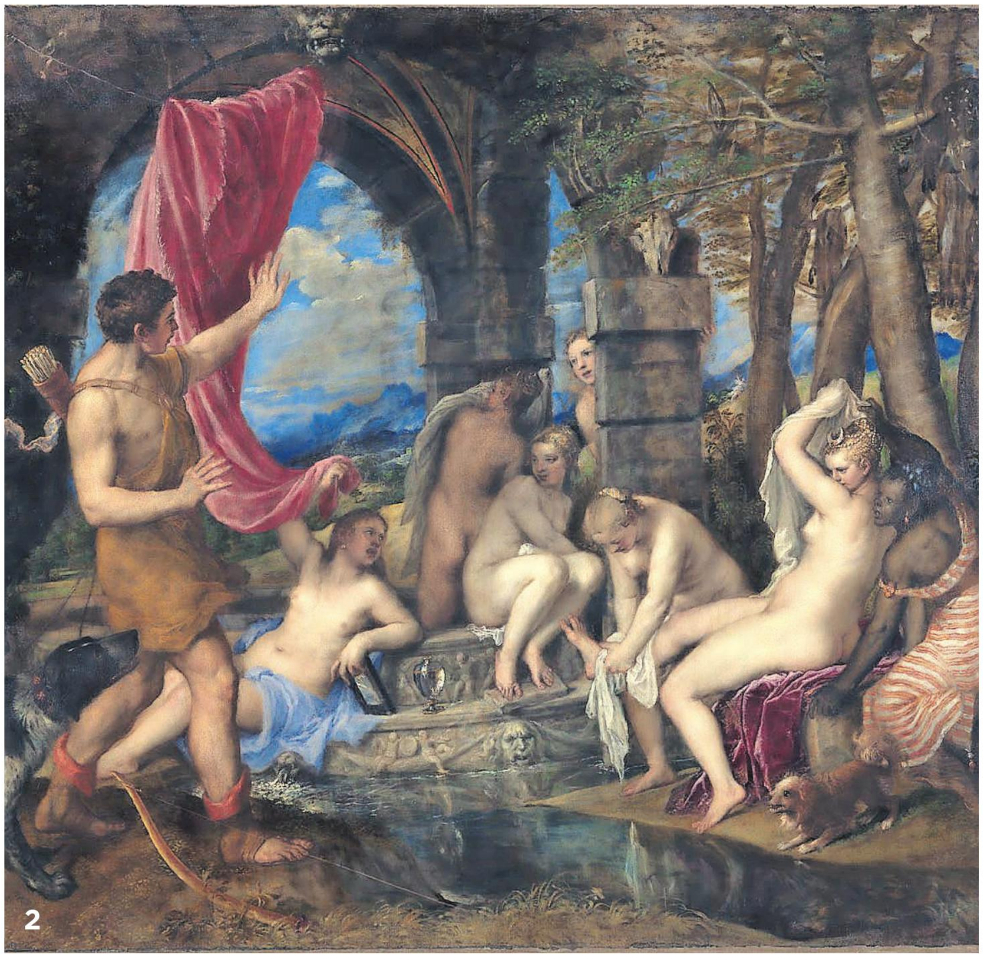
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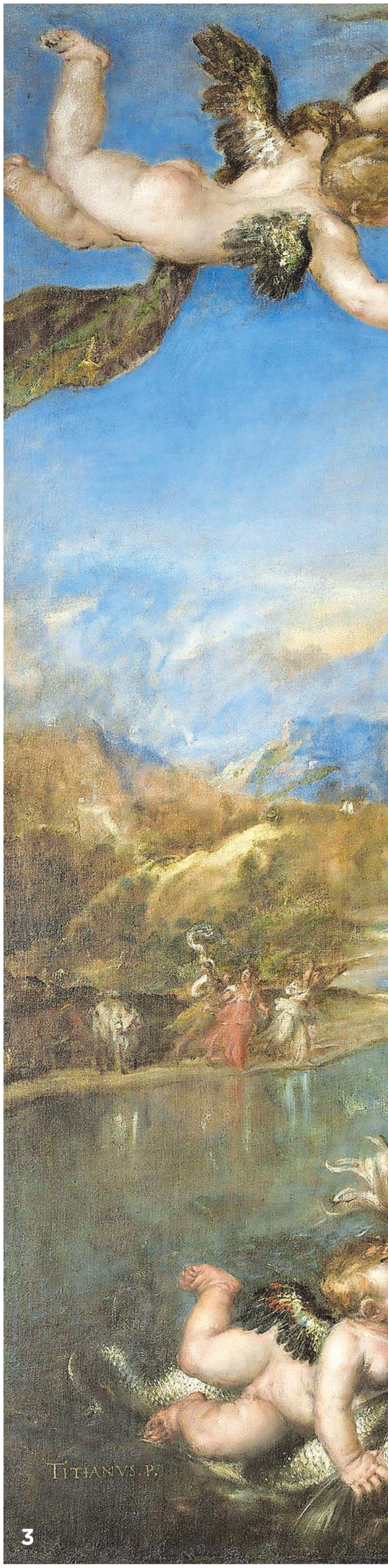

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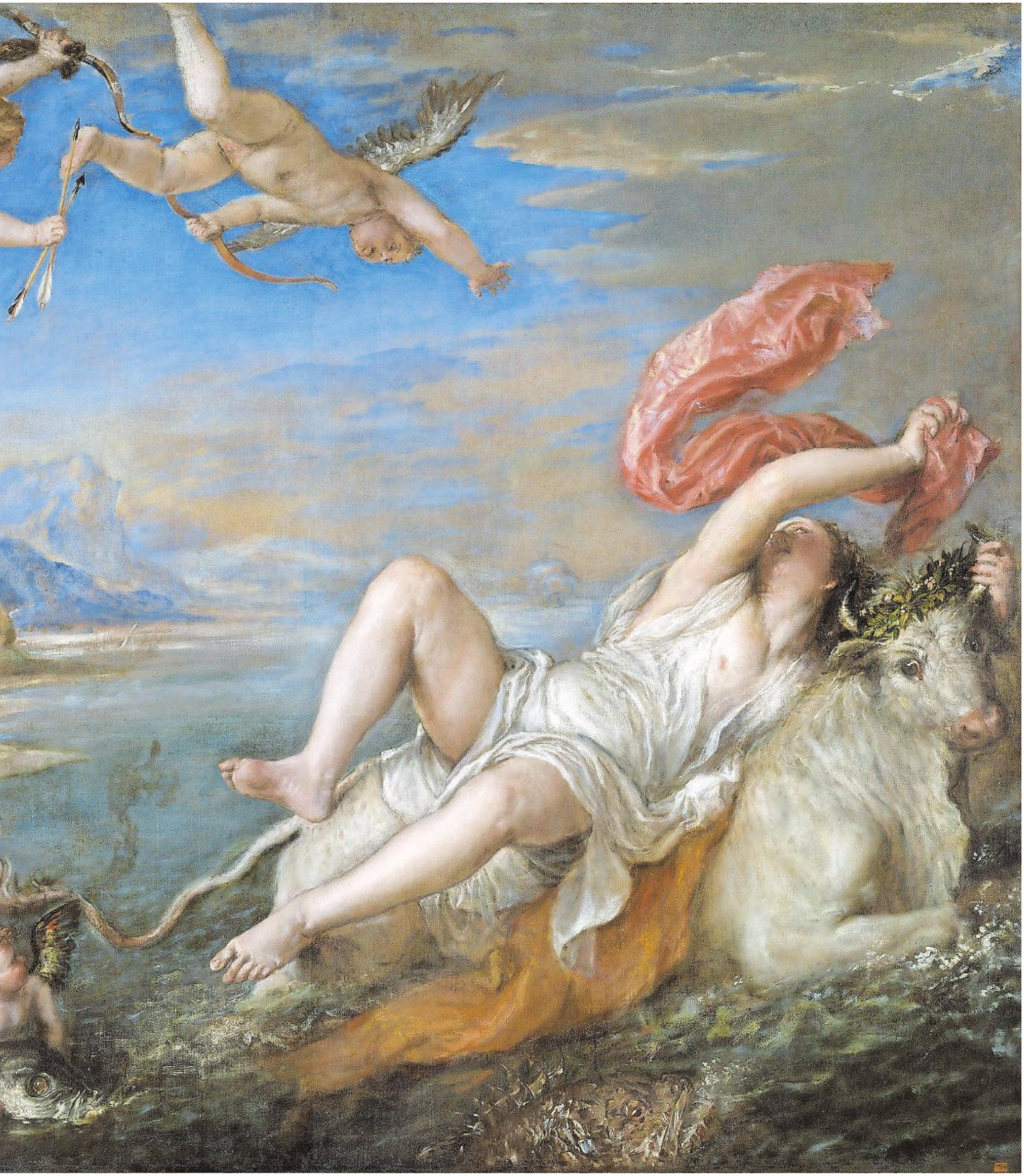

MASTERPIECES:
1 *Diana and Callisto* (1556-9)
Credit: The National Gallery London/The National Galleries of Scotland

2 *Diana and Actaeon* (1556-9)
Credit: The National Gallery London/The National Galleries of Scotland

3 *The Rape of Europa* (1560-2)
Credit: Collection Photography, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

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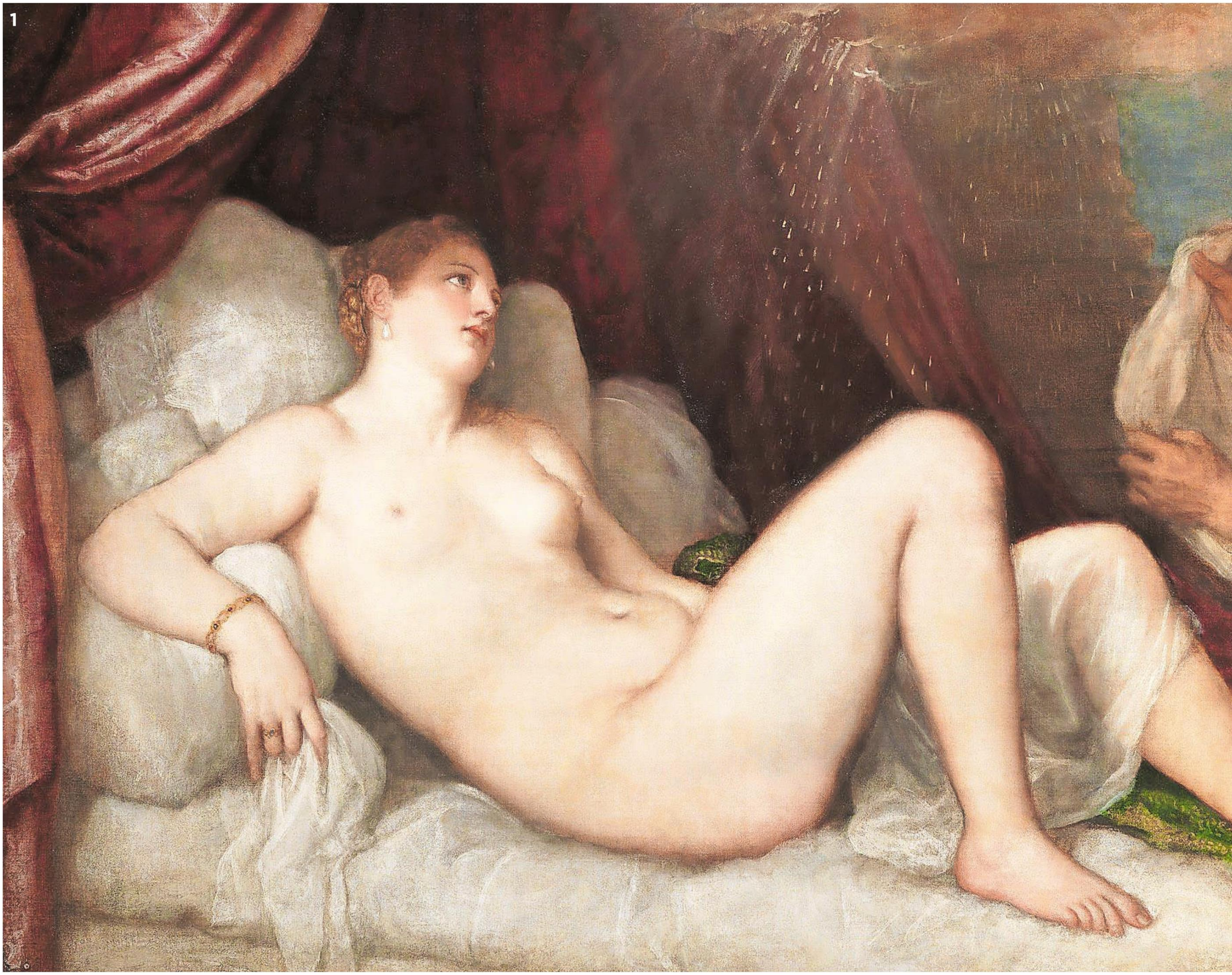

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to European art-lovers, and a masterpiece that is simultaneously thrilling, shocking and whimsical.

This abduction of Europa by Jupiter, disguised as a bull, was set at sea by Titian, the bull splashing through the water, hellbent on reaching Crete, with grotesque sea monsters in his wake.

Putti tumble into the scene, while helpless maid servants gesticulate on the shore.

The whole is a dizzying affair, and it is easy to understand the passion for this addition to her collection by the wealthy American who acquired the picture in 1896.

At £20,000 it was then the most expensive picture in the US, and possibly bought only because Gardner was on the rebound, having just missed out on Gainsborough's *The Blue Boy*.

Normally viewed above furniture at her Venetian-style palazzo in Boston, where the collector's original hang is strictly adhered to, and considered the most important Old Master in the United States, *The Rape of Europa* on a wall of its own in London and reunited with its companions, is a sight worth waiting for while the exhibition is on hold.

The sequence opens with the erotic *Danaë*, artfully designed to quicken the royal pulse.

The version in the Duke of Wellington's collection at Apsley House, London, is now recognised as the correct companion to the other five paintings, although for many years the Prado's *Danaë* was thought to be the opening painting in the set.

EROTIC:
1 Titian's *Danaë* (1551-53)
Credit: Wellington Collection, Apsley House, London

2 *The Death of Actaeon* (1559-75)
Credit: The National Gallery

3 *Perseus and Andromeda* (1554-6)
Photo: The Wallace Collection, London

Apsley House's *Danaë* was cut down, and so it is an invisible Jupiter who impregnates a receptive, dreamy nude with a shower of gold, an older servant catching stray gilded drops in her apron.

Perseus, who will be born of this union, grows up to fulfil the oracle's prophesy by killing his grandfather, the King of Argus, albeit accidentally, with a discus.

The goddess Diana, in two pictures jointly owned by the National Gallery and National Galleries Scotland, is a long way from this supine consort.

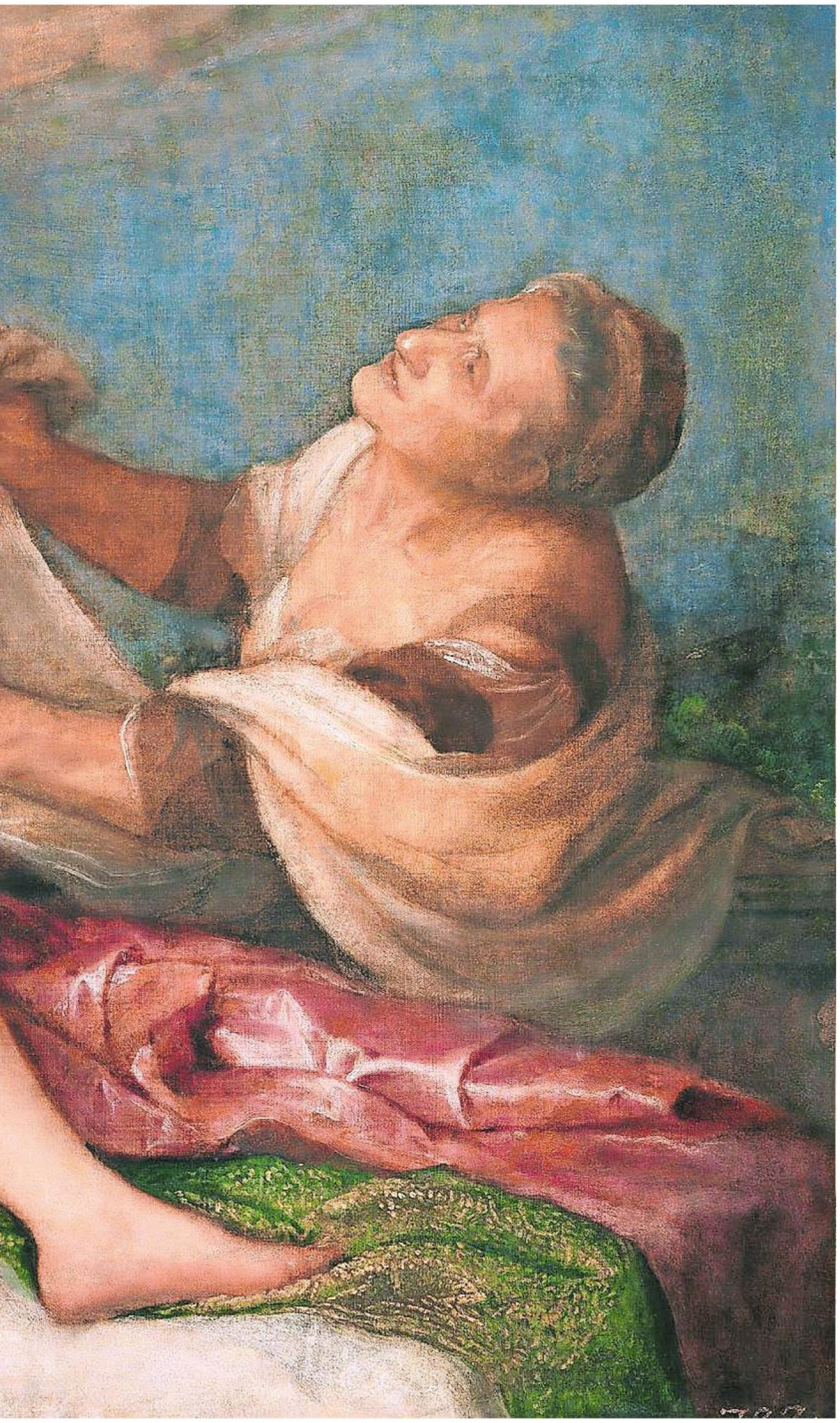
Furious at being discovered bathing by Actaeon, the goddess of hunting turns the accidental voyeur into a stag, which will be torn apart by his own hounds.

The goddess's operatic rage in *Diana and Actaeon* (1556-59) burns out of an alluring tangle of golden locks and pearls.

She is incandescent again in *Diana and Callisto*, when her handmaiden, bathing nude, is revealed to be pregnant – by Jupiter, of course, who disguised himself as Diana herself when he made his move.

Callisto and her son, Arcas, will be transformed into two constellations – Ursa Major, the Great Bear, and Arctophylax, the Herdsman.

The two Diana pictures, now jointly owned by the National Gallery and



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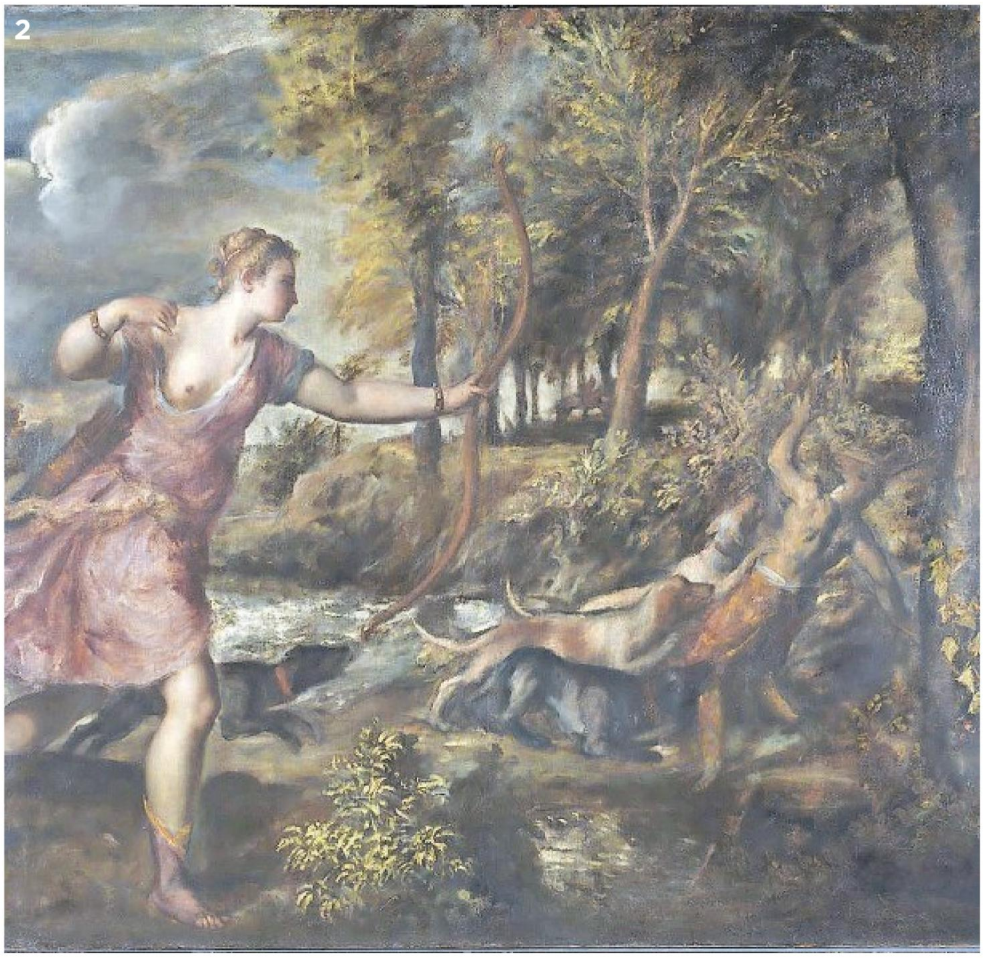

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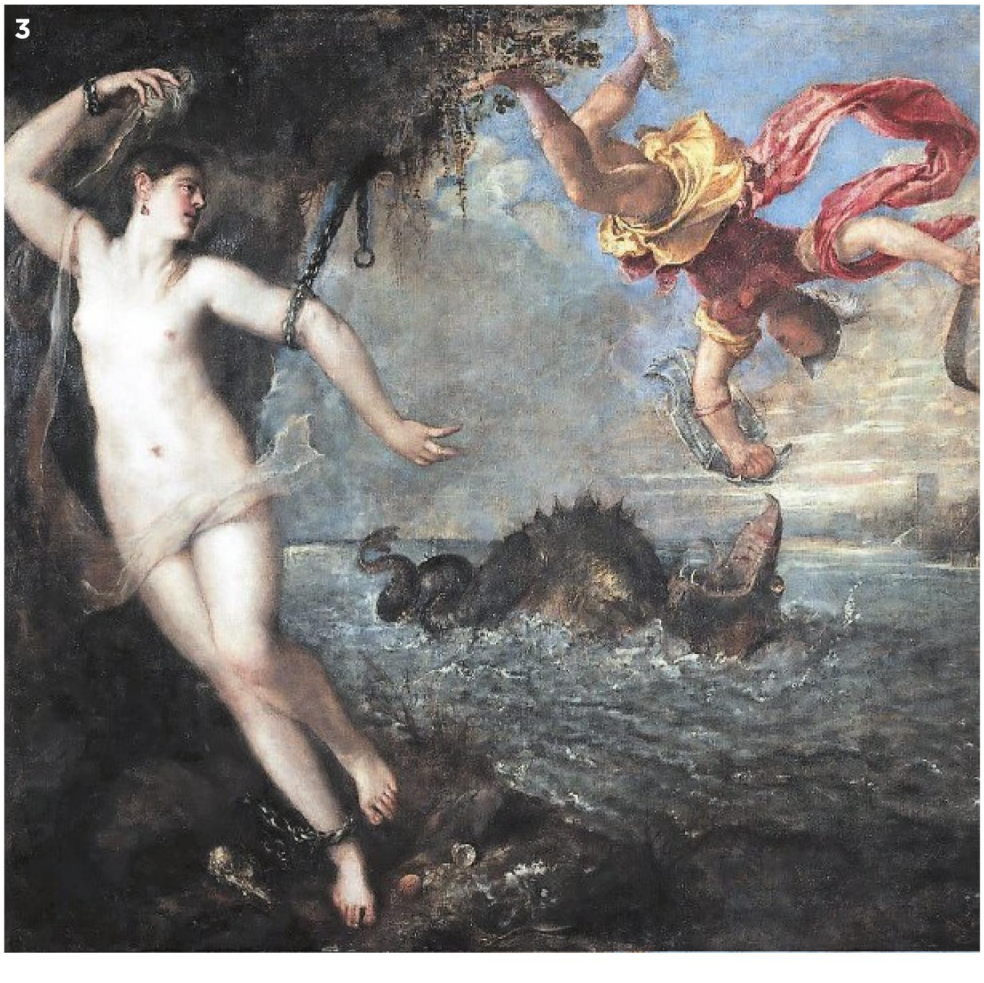

National Galleries of Scotland, were part of a shipment of artworks bound for Philip.

It took a year to progress overland from Venice to Genoa, by sea to Cartagena, and by road to Philip's residence in Toledo, from where it was probably then carted on to Madrid.

It was the fate of the *Poesie* to criss-cross Europe, just as their themes and characters intersected.

The anxious passion with which the goddess clings to her mortal lover in the Prado's *Venus and Adonis* (c1553-54) is the antithesis of Diana's fury.

The son of Danae and Jupiter, Perseus, plunging from the sky to kill a sea monster in the Wallace Collection's *Perseus and Andromeda* (c1554-56) is as purposeful in his endeavour as Actaeon is shocked by his own mistake.

To fly and dive, yearn and regret, and to burn with shame or anger on the carousel of gods and mortals that is the *Poesie* is a heady experience indeed. This show has been nearly 500 years in the making. What's a little wait compared with that?

■ *Titian: Love, Desire, Death* is to be reopened at a later date at the National Gallery, London. It will tour to the Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston and the Prado, Madrid. The catalogue by curator Matthias Wivel and colleagues costs £25. A BBC documentary, *Titian Behind Closed Doors*, is on iPlayer

SPECIAL K

EUROPE'S AUTEUR FROM THE AGE OF ARTHOUSE

For a time, Krzysztof Kieślowski was perhaps Europe's most fashionable director. A timely retrospective reminds us why. **JAMES OLIVER** reports

Over the years, there's been many an upset when the Cannes film festival hands out its prizes. But what happened in 1994 was a doozy. That year, by common consensus, Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski had the Palme d'Or in the bag. He'd premiered *Red*, the third part of his *Three Colours trilogy* and, like the earlier shades (*Blue*, *White*), the critics had swooned. Victory was a mere formality.

But that year's jury disagreed. They awarded the top prize to *Pulp Fiction* (you know that one, right?) and gave not a sausage to Kieslowski or his film. Sure things aren't always what they might seem at Cannes.

It's a tiny moment in the grand scheme of things and might seem especially insignificant now, amid all the troubles of our own era. But look a little closer: the upset of 1994 represented something more than just personal taste, something worth thinking about as we contemplate how our world will change.

Kieslowski's reputation has diminished since 1994 but the current lockdown offers an excellent opportunity to (re)discover him, especially since his first four films are newly available in an essential boxset. Unlike the older generation of Polish directors (Andrzej Wajda, Roman Polanski), Kieslowski was too young to remember when his homeland was free – born in 1941, he barely remembered the war.

Not for him stories of confrontation and grand national anguish: his films played out on altogether more intimate terrain.

The films in this boxset reveals a young director defining himself. *The Scar* (1976) is about that oh-so communist subject, construction (in this case, of a chemical factory), although things go less smoothly here than in most communist construction movies: not because Kieslowski wanted to make a political statement but because he'd begun as a documentarian and still held a commitment to showing things as they were, warts and all.

Camera Buff (1979) was more pointed; it concerns an amateur filmmaker, whose hobby overwhelms his life. But it also touches on issues all Polish filmmakers then faced, very much including Kieslowski, like state interference and even censorship

Kieslowski always anchored his stories in recognisably realistic environments but beginning with *Blind Chance* (1981), he became more interested in metaphysics.

It's a film about fate and destiny, and how easily they can be derailed: in three separate stories we see what happens to

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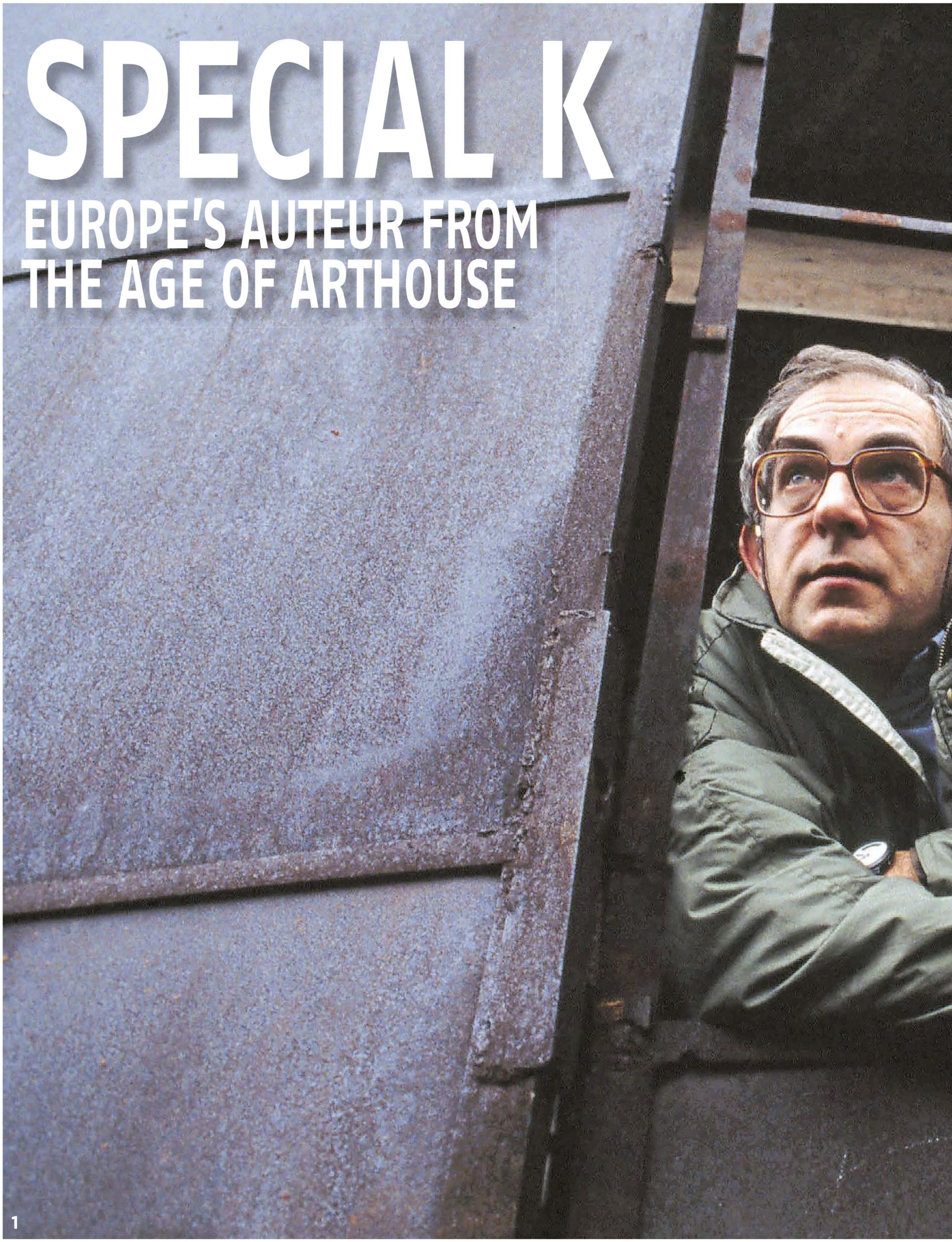

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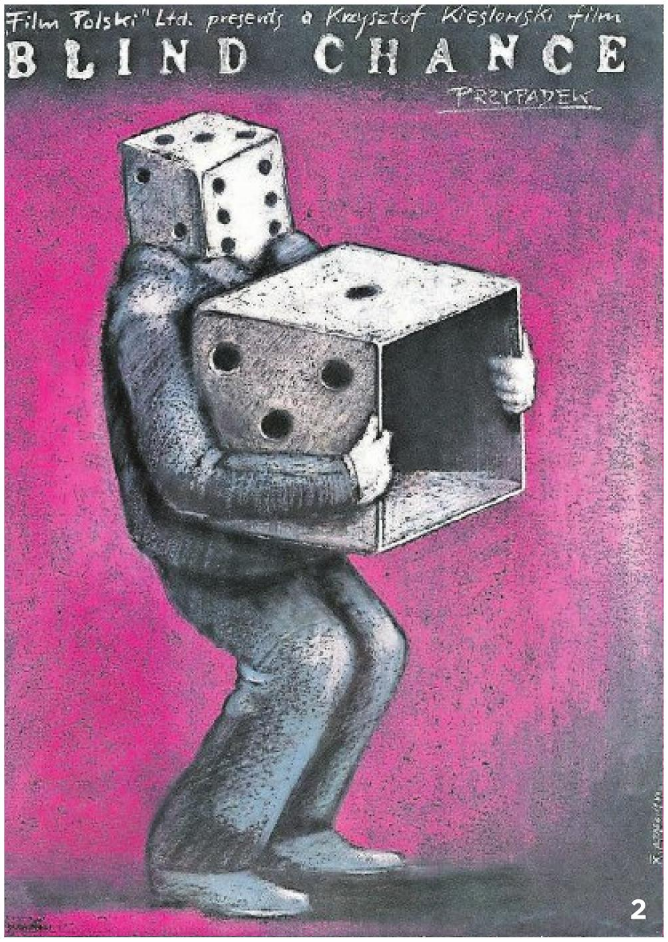
ARTIST FOR THE TIMES:
1 Polish film director Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1990
Photo: Getty Images

2, **3** Posters for *Blind Chance* (1987) and *No End* (1985)


"Film Polski" Ltd. presents a Krzysztof Kieslowski film
BLIND CHANCE
PRZYPADEK

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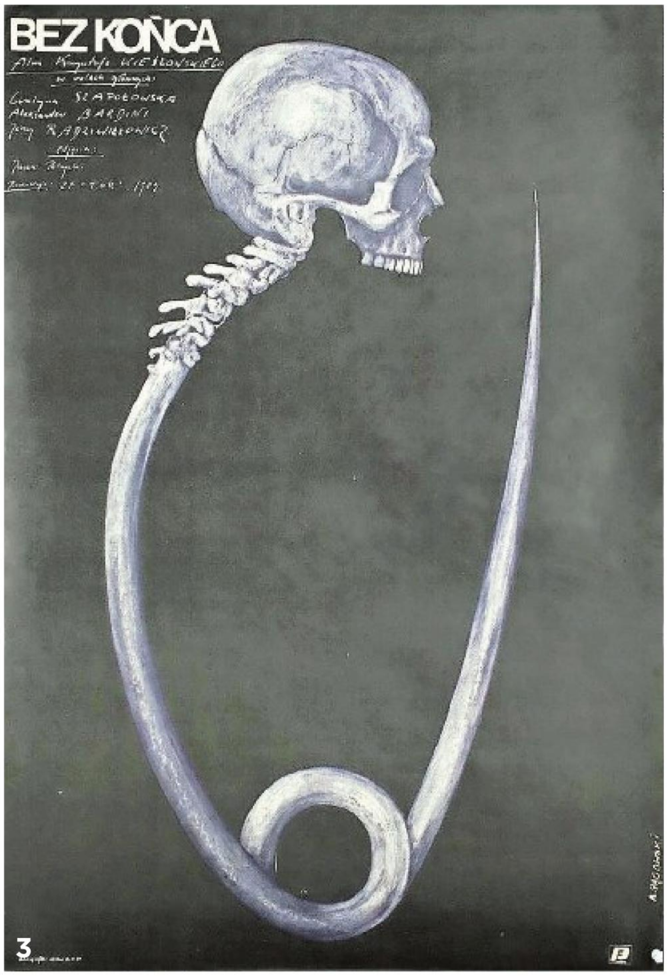
BEZ KOŇCA
SZAPOŁOWSKA
BARDINI
RADZIWIŁOWICZ

3

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the same young would-be commuter depending on whether he makes his train or not.

In one, he becomes a communist apparatchik, in another, a dissident. In the third he remains apolitical. (*Sliding Doors* later recycled the same premise for a rom-com: how appropriate that a film about alternatives should have an alternative all of its own.)

In spite of its director's protestations, this was taken as a political film and kept it under lock and key for six years (communism, after all, was supposed to be inevitable, not a quirk of fate).

Curiously, the more directly political *No End* (1985) got a (slightly) easier ride; it is a film about grief, following a recently-widowed young woman whose mourning is observed by the ghost of her husband.

But it is set during the martial law period of the early 1980s, the external turbulence in the country mirroring the emotional disruption of the main character, her sadness a microcosm of the country's own.

Unlike *Blind Chance*, *No End* at least got a release, although it was to an overwhelming hostile reaction – it took something rare indeed to unite the Catholic church and the communists but *No End* managed to annoy them both (the church disliked its theology, the communists its politics). The experience bruised Kieslowski, who vowed his next project would avoid controversy.

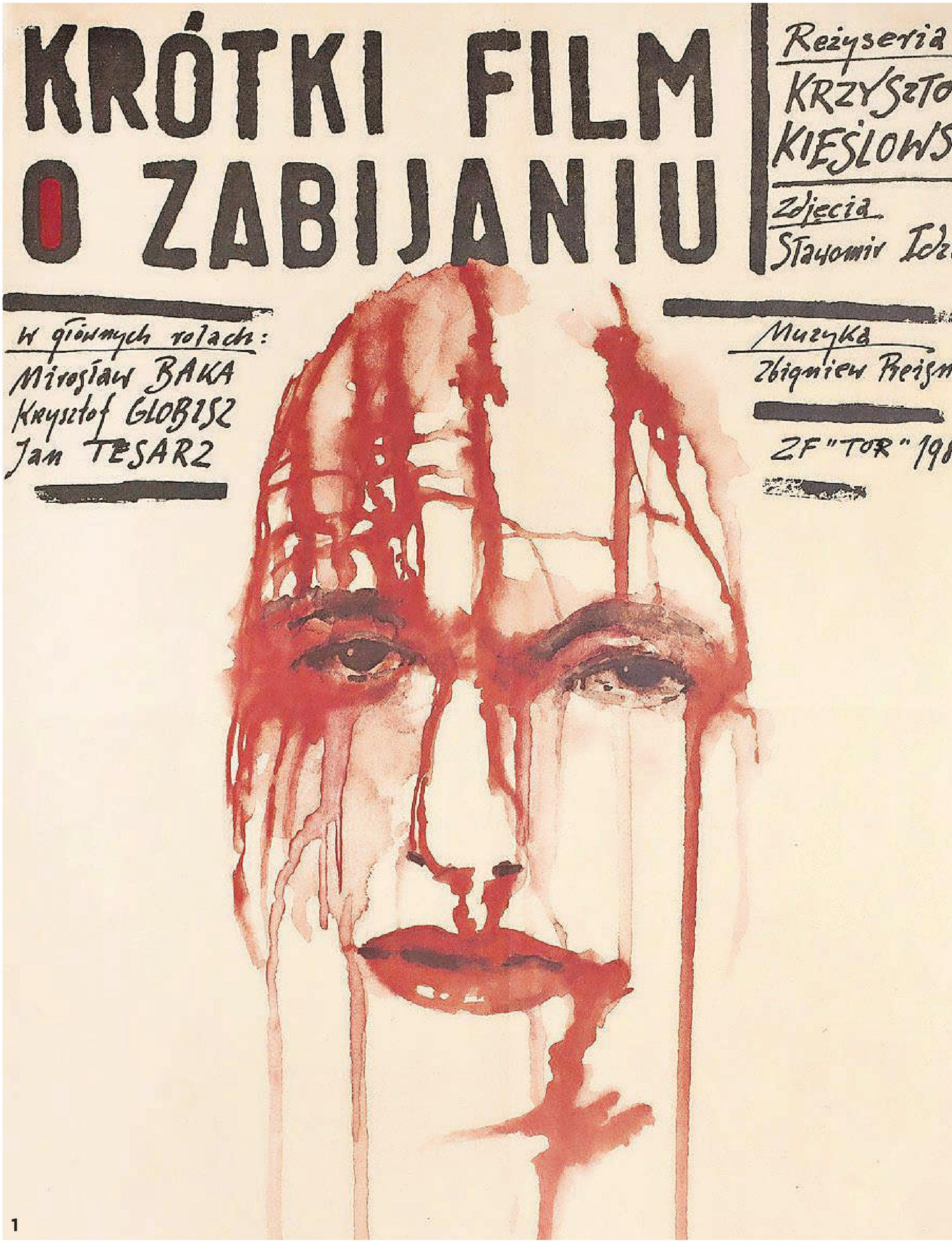
This project would be made for television, and it deserves to be ranked amongst the greatest achievements in that medium, something that knocks most products even of our supposed 'golden age' of TV into a cocked hat.

The original title was *Dekalog*. When it was shown on BBC2, it was re-titled *The Ten Commandments*, which goes some way to explain what it's about.

Set in an apartment block in modern Poland, each episode was a self-contained film freely inspired by one of the Old Testament injunctions. Not that any Biblical aspect is stressed: although co-writer Krzysztof Piesiewicz was a Catholic, Kieslowski was not a religious man and certainly had no interest in producing tracts or trite morality plays. Rather, he uses them as a way of exploring moral dilemmas, missteps and mistakes.

As with the originals, some of Kieslowski's commandments are better known than others. Aware that there might be limited opportunities to sell a Polish TV series overseas Kieslowski persuaded his producers to let him expand a couple of the commandments to feature length, and naturally, he picked the juiciest. 'Thou shalt not kill' became the anti-death penalty *A Short Film About Killing* while *A Short Film About Love* was a twisted take on 'thou shalt not commit adultery'.

These are (relatively) straightforward treatments of their subjects, and the most obviously moralistic of the series. Elsewhere, however, things are more tangled and oblique. #2 ('thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain') is about medical ethics and marital fidelity while #8 ('thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour') muddies the waters with guilt and the Holocaust. #7 is 'thou shalt not steal' but Kieslowski and Piesiewicz resist the obvious: the story might just as easily be



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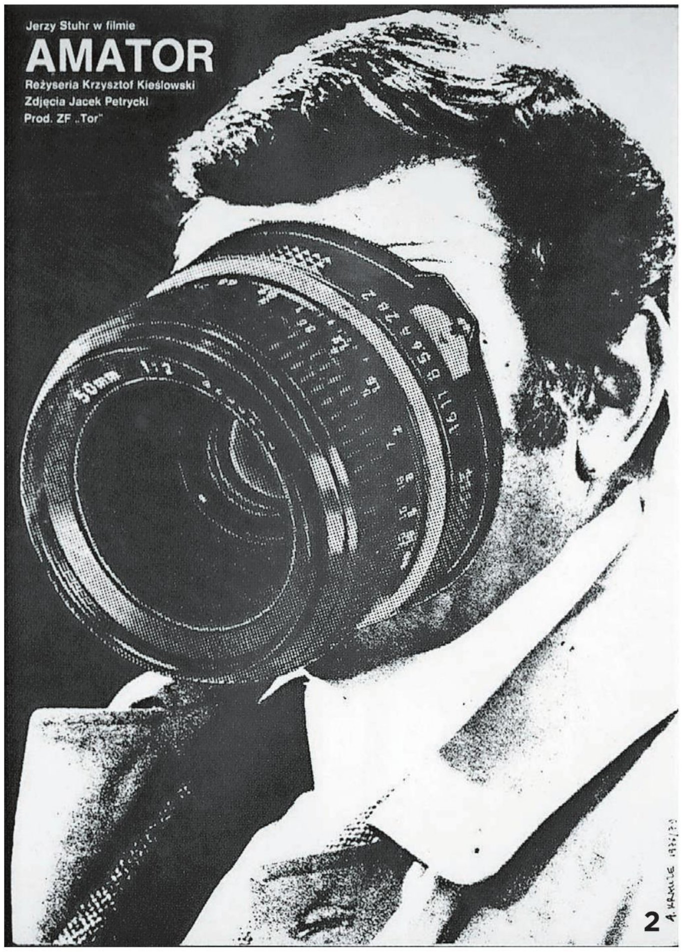
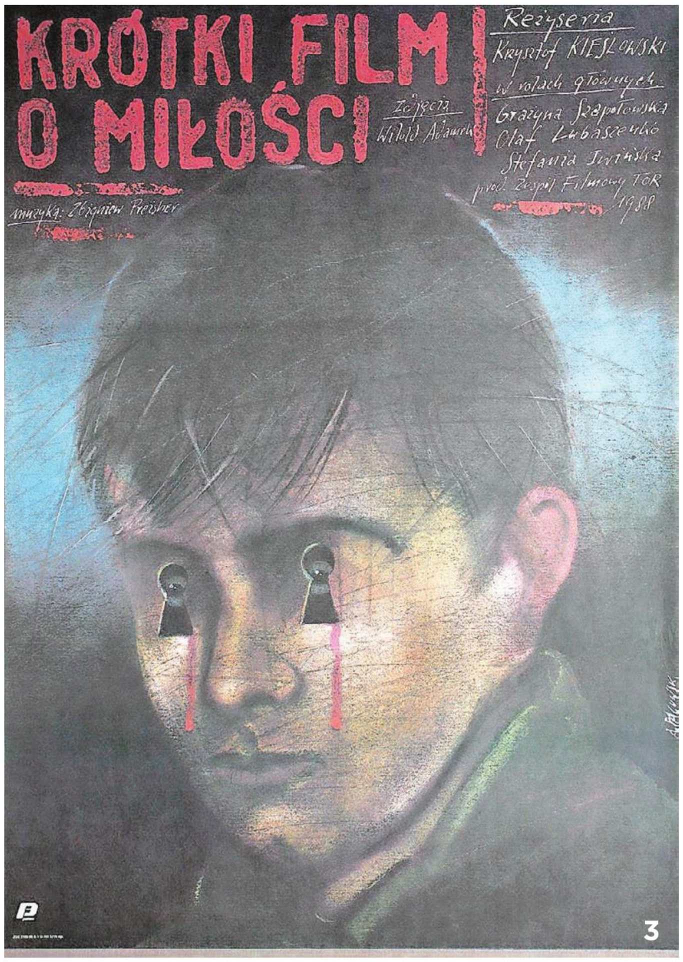




CONTROVERSY: **1**, **2**, **3** Posters for *A Short Film About Killing* (1988), *Camera Buff* (1979) and *A Short Film About Love* (1988)

4 Regular Kieslowski collaborator Artur Barcis in *No End* (1985)

Photo: IMDB

used for ‘honour thy father and thy mother’ or ‘thou shalt not covet’.

In many ways, the whole ‘ten commandments’ schtick is actually a bit of a red herring; the point of the Bible’s commandments was clarity and simplicity: a framework for an easy life.

But life isn’t easy and mistakes get made, and that’s what Kieslowski shows, messiness and human fallibility; the films are knotty and morally complex – ‘adult’ in the best sense of the word.

As Kieslowski had hoped, his *Short Films About Killing* and *Love* made an impact on the international film circuit. More surprisingly, there was a clamour to see the entire sequence from which they were drawn, and near-universal acclaim from the critics when they became more widely available.

It helped that the series arrived in the west as communism withered away, the Cold War ended and feelings of international solidarity were running high.

Kieslowski seemed like the artist for the times: where Hollywood was shallow and materialistic, here was a filmmaker of gravity and seriousness who gave audiences what they needed, not necessarily what they wanted.

His next film confirmed this. Straddling the divide between east and west, *The Double Life of Veronique* tells parallel stories of two identical women, both played by Irène Jacob. One is French (Veronique), the other Polish (Weronika); neither is ever aware of the other, although both sense they are not alone.

It’s a mysterious, delicate film that declines to explain itself (but then, why should it?). Certainly, it showed Kieslowski moving effortlessly to the international stage and he would become more ambitious yet: *The Three Colours* trilogy, like *Dekalog*, was inspired by an overarching theme, in this case the revolutionary ideals of *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité*. (The colour scheme comes from the French Tricolour.)

Blue (1993) came first, the story of a grieving widow, unhappily ‘free’ of her obligations to her loved one. It won top prize at the Venice film festival that year. *White* (1994), about an unfortunate Polish emigre adrift in Paris, was garlanded at the Berlin film festival in 1994. That’s why people thought *Red* was a shoo-in at Cannes. Why, symmetry alone demanded it!

But this is where we came in, with *Pulp Fiction* upsetting the balance. Let’s not be snooty: *Pulp Fiction* is a great film and a deserving winner. But with hindsight, we can see it was also a straw in the wind, showing how things would change in the post-Cold War world, a culture no longer much interested in high-seriousness, where the traditional European art-house film was no longer as central to the discourse as once it was.

Kieslowski himself would not see this eclipse. He died in 1996 after surgery following a heart attack. It’s easy to forget just how highly he was regarded in the mid-1990s even beyond even the critical eulogies: name-dropped in *The League of Gentlemen*, even inspiring a punk band’s name (3 Colours Red, whose song *Sixty Mile Smile* is, officially, a banger).

His work has been less widely discussed since then, his influence muted. But so what? Even if Kieslowski is not as fashionable as he was, those who watch the films will see why they were held in such regard. They have lost neither their power or their humanity.

And who knows, such things might find themselves in vogue once more.

The age of irony that began when the Berlin Wall fell has survived 9/11, the War against Terror, the great crash and all that followed. But Covid-19 looks set to shake things more fundamentally. We’ll find out what that means soon enough.

■ *Cinema of Conflict: Four Films by Krzystof Kieslowski* is available from Arrow Academy

New York

A CITY IN MUSIC

SPIRIT CITY

STEELY COOL: Blondie in New York, 1978. From left, Clem Burke, Chris Stein, Debbie Harry, Jimmy Destri, Frank Infante and Nigel Harrison

Photo: Getty Images

The music of the Big Apple is every bit as a brash, bold and brilliant as the city itself, says **SOPHIA DEBOICK**

The musical soul of New York is the musical soul of America. The vagaries of 20th century history have rarely dented the confident, even arrogant, spirit of the music from and about the city, and its iconic music venues – Madison Square Garden, Carnegie Hall, Radio City Music Hall – remain a byword for having made it in the industry. While in the 1960s and 1970s a darker side of the city was explored, the image of New York as the spiritual capital of the land of opportunity has not been shaken, even by disaster.

While Hollywood was a vital habitat for the development of the Great American Songbook, Broadway's musical theatre and New York's West 28th Street, otherwise known as Tin Pan Alley, were crucial to the formation of America's modern musical bedrock throughout the eras of the Jazz Age, the Great Depression and the Second World War.

The immigrants that built the nation were central to this. The Belarusian Irving Berlin embodied the American Dream. Having arrived on Ellis Island in 1893, aged just five, as one of the Statue of Liberty's 'huddled masses', he would go on to define the golden age of American song.

George Gershwin was born Jacob Bruskin Gershowitz, to Russian and Lithuanian parents in Brooklyn in 1898, just five years after the Brooklyn Bridge linked the borough to Manhattan. He saw his ***Rhapsody in Blue***, premiered in New York in 1924, as "a musical kaleidoscope of America", but its association with New York was implicit and was cemented half a century later through its use over the opening credits of Woody Allen's *Manhattan* (1979).

Of rich Midwestern stock, Cole Porter was quite a different figure, but jazz was central to his musical DNA, just like Berlin and Gershwin. He partied in New York as a student at Yale, and his 1930 Prohibition-set musical *The New Yorkers* featured an ode to the city, ***I Happen to Like New York***, as well as the then-scandalous streetwalker's song ***Love for Sale***.

Billie Holiday would make that song her own in 1952, having honed her craft in the jazz clubs of Harlem. Indeed, while jazz was born in New Orleans, during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, New York City was where its stars were truly made.

Louis Armstrong and Count Basie were among those who cut their teeth in Harlem's jazz joints, the area's 133rd Street known as 'Swing Street' for its many music clubs and speakeasies.

The improvisational style of bebop would later emerge out of the artistic and intellectual vibrance of 1920s Harlem, with Minton's Playhouse, opened in 1938 at West 118th Street's Cecil Hotel, providing a stage for the innovations of Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker and Miles Davis. When the Ohioan composer Billy Strayhorn gave swing king Duke Ellington his signature tune ***Take the A Train*** (1939), referencing the new A subway service running from Brooklyn, he immortalised pre-War Harlem.

In the 1960s, New York experienced another great creative explosion when the counter culture coalesced in the city's East Village, and in the following decade, when the city staked its claim as the birthplace of punk (after all, the 1976 debut LP by Queens natives the Ramones appeared six months before the canonical 'first punk record', *New Rose*, by Brits, The Damned).

The Velvet Underground, fronted by Brooklynite Lou Reed, were immersed in bohemian New York, their 1967 debut album inextricable from the Warholian circus, with Warhol providing their management, creative inspiration, and the LP's banana cover image. They were just as immersed in the city's rampant drug culture, ***I'm Waiting for the Man*** a tableau of a junkie meeting a dealer on the corner of East 125th Street and Lexington Avenue, Harlem – "Up to Lexington, one, two, five/ Feel sick and dirty, more dead than alive."

A nine-week residency at Park Avenue's Max's Kansas City in the summer of 1970 were The Velvet Underground's final performances before Reed left in acrimony. Along with the CBGB in the Bowery, Max's was where New York's alternative sounds transitioned from the glam proto-punk of the New York Dolls to punk proper.

The Ramones played their first ever gig at CBGB in the summer of 1974, releasing a debut LP 18 months later that was soaked in both the frenetic atmosphere of the burgeoning downtown punk scene and the seedier aspects of New York life, like album track ***53rd & 3rd***, which referred to the area of Midtown where male prostitutes solicited for work.

The native New Yorker new wave stars that came out of the same CBGB gene pool were by turns chic and cerebral, from the steely cool of Blondie, whose ***In The Flesh*** (1976) sang of "walking one day on the Lower East Side", to Television's debut ***Marquee Moon*** (1977), full of imagery of the Bowery, and the art-pop of urban sophisticates Talking Heads, whose first charting single, ***Psycho Killer*** (1977) became associated with the Son of Sam killings that had terrorised New Yorkers the previous summer.

Disco was of course the other musical story of 1970s New York, emerging from the gay clubs of SoHo – most famously David Mancuso's Loft and Nicky Siano's Gallery – to become both exclusive and famous through Manhattan's Studio 54, which opened in 1977 and was another New York institution anointed by Warhol, who said it was "a dictatorship at the door, democracy on the floor".

Indeed, Nile Rodgers' Chic, originally known as the Big Apple Band, wrote their ***Le Freak*** after being turned away by the club's notorious doormen on New Year's

NOW LISTEN TO THE MUSIC...

Find the accompanying playlist on Spotify. Just search

NEW EUROPEAN: NEW YORK

Featuring:

Blue Skies
Irving Berlin

Subway Train
New York Dolls

Le Freak
Chic

Angel of Harlem
U2

IN THRALL TO NYC

The British and Irish have eulogised New York as a repository of dreams, even if they are dreams that are dashed. While U2's *Angel of Harlem* (1988) evokes the wide-eyed wonder of the newcomer landing at JFK – "New York, like a Christmas tree/ Tonight this city belongs to me" – the Pogues and Kirsty MacColl's *Fairytale of New York* (1987) reflected the city's pitfalls, its immigrant protagonists marvelling at its "rivers of gold", before spiralling into dissolution. Sting's *Englishman in New York* (1988) was inspired by Quentin Crisp's move to Manhattan, reflecting on the bitter-sweetness of New York as a place where anyone can be themselves but where alienation is rife.

Eve 1977. By that time, Odyssey's ***Native New Yorker***, the Village People, and the Brooklyn-shot *Saturday Night Fever* had taken disco global.

Since the 1970s, New York has not been short of musical love letters from its native sons and daughters. The Bronx's Billy Joel sang of the irresistible pull of his hometown – "Been high in the Rockies under the evergreens/ I know what I'm needing/ And I don't want to waste more time/ I'm in a New York state of mind" – in 1976, making affectionate mention of Chinatown and Riverside, the New York Times and the *New York Daily News*. Manhattanite Fred Ebb's lyrics for the title song of ***New York, New York*** (1977), one of Scorsese's many filmic engagements with the mythos of the city, would become perhaps the ultimate tribute to the Big Apple when Sinatra sang it at Radio City Music Hall in 1978 and adopted it as one of his signature tunes.

After September 2001, such tributes became more poignant, but also maintained the confident defiance that seems hardwired into American national song. New Yorkers the Beastie Boys' ***An Open Letter to NYC*** (2004) declared "Brooklyn, Bronx, Queens and Staten/ From the Battery to the top of Manhattan/ Asian, Middle Eastern and Latin/ Black, white, New York you make it happen", adding "Since 9-11 we're still living/ And loving life we've been given". On ***Empire State of Mind*** (2009), Brooklynite Jay-Z stated "long live the World Trade", while on Alicia Keys' expanded version of the song to which she had contributed the original chorus vocals, the city was embraced warts and all. Despite being a place where crime and want have always had a foothold, the magic of New York means "these streets will make you feel brand new".

STAR TURNS
BY TIM WALKER

AN ACTOR FROM ANOTHER TIME

I first met Donald Sinden in the mid-1980s when I showed up too early at his home in Golders Green in north London. He came to the door in his dressing gown and slippers and his hair all over the place and told me he wasn't quite ready. It was nearly midday, but actors keep different hours from the rest of us, and so I took a walk around the block and came back at the appointed time.

Sinden had in the meantime got on his public face, which meant he was booted, suited and brilliantined. It was an old-fashioned look even then and there was something about his whole demeanour that seemed to invite ridicule. The satirical puppet show *Spitting Image* was at the time portraying him as an incurable old ham who was desperate for a knighthood.

Within his profession, he was often seen as an anachronism. Regional accents, five o'clock shadow and naturalism had become the norm for actors since the kitchen sink dramas of the 1960s, but Sinden was having none of it.

He was still defiantly making a point of not only looking like he had just walked off the set of one of his old Rank films, like *Doctor in the House*, but also enunciating every syllable perfectly and poshly.

He looked at me uncomprehendingly when I broached these subjects. He insisted he'd never thought for a moment about a knighthood, and, as for the new style of acting, he happened to feel "drawing rooms were eminently more comfortable to sit in than kitchen sinks". He had been trained at the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art, and he was damned if, as a secondary schoolboy from a humble home in Plymouth, he was going to unlearn what they'd taught him.

Sinden's failure to move with the times could sometimes, of course, be embarrassing. In 1979, he was one of the last actors to be willing to 'black up' to play Othello, but he saw nothing wrong about it because Laurence Olivier had done the very same thing. He didn't get that society had moved on since 1964.

He could also be a professional snob. Of his time making the Hollywood adventure film *Mogambo*, he said its star Clark Gable was no more than "a lorry driver who'd got it into his head he could act". He added that, while filming on location in equatorial Africa, he'd had the misfortune to have a tent beside Gable's and was kept awake most nights as he set about bedding virtually the entire female cast.

If I lampooned Sinden in the piece I wrote back then he was lampooning himself every bit as much in television sitcoms such as *Two's Company* and *Never the Twain*. In the former, he was sent up by an irreverent American writer played by Elaine Stritch, and, in the latter, Windsor Davies' rough-and-ready antique dealer.

The fates decreed that was not to be my last encounter with Sinden, and in the ensuing decades, I found myself interviewing him or meeting him socially again and again. Whether he had actually forgotten or chose to forget my first piece, I will never know, but his good humour and remorseless cheerfulness eventually began to wear me down.

He finally got his knighthood in 1997 and his profession came in time to appreciate him. I well remember the warmth in the applause he received for his last stage performance as an ageing opera star in a revival of Ronald Harwood's play *Quartet* in 1999.

Ultimately, Sinden couldn't help being himself. When I telephoned him for a comment about the death of Elaine Stritch, his first reaction was "rejoice, rejoice". Stritch had made his life hell during the filming of *Two's Company*. He was for a time doubling up in a West End stage production in the evenings and found the endless re-takes necessitated by her heavy drinking physically exhausting. After explaining all of that, he remembered his public persona and said that, on second thoughts, could I please just quote him as saying he was "very sad" she'd died.

The last time I saw Sinden it was in a restaurant when, not long before his death, he did a spot of table-hopping, and, for a few happy moments, he joined mine. He cracked a series of jokes and I remember looking at him and wondering why I'd expended so much time trying to analyse such a straightforward man. Even when he was almost 90, he never lost that childlike need to please and to make people happy.

GOOD HUMOUR: Donald Sinden and Jeannie Carson in *An Alligator Named Daisy* (1955)

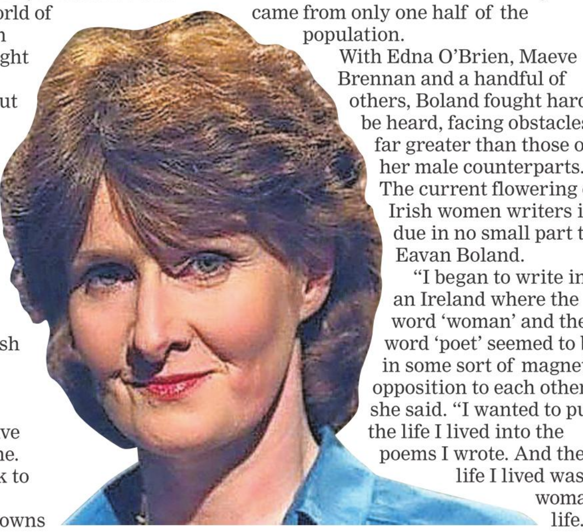
Photo: Getty Images

FAREWELL TO A POET WHO BLAZED TRAIL FOR WOMEN

CHARLIE CONNELLY pays tribute to Eavan Boland, a groundbreaking talent who helped transform her country

In these times of enforced stillness, we need the moments of mental stillness provided by poetry more than ever. Not to mention how the slices of truth found in verse are even more cherishable as we negotiate a political climate defined by its casual attitude towards the truth. From literary celebrities coming together online to recite *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* to millennials hammering out couplets on a vintage typewriter to post on Instagram, the time-outs provided by poetry have been a source of much needed solace for many in these trying times.

The death of a poet somehow sends out ripples beyond the immediate sorrow of loss and the death on April 27 of Eavan Boland deprives us of a poetic voice both soothing and incisive, an absence that emphasises the world of difference between stillness and outright silence.



PIONEER: Eavan Boland emerged into an Irish literary landscape dominated by men
Photo: Wikipedia

Boland was 75 but still writing – the *New Yorker* had published a new poem a few days before her death – and still teaching as recently as March, relishing her role as a professor of English at Stanford University and director of the university's creative writing programme.

She'd flown back to Ireland to beat the coronavirus lockdowns but fell victim to a stroke at her home in Dundrum on the outskirts of Dublin. The suddenness of her passing caught the literary world entirely unprepared.

In 2013 Boland wrote an obituary for Seamus Heaney that encapsulated why the death of a poet has its own particular poignancy.

"No part of his poetry seemed finished," she lamented. "No aspect of his work looked to be over."

For admirers of her output, which began in the 1960s when she was still a student at Trinity College, Dublin, the words now apply equally to the person who wrote them.

"As a practitioner, he was an extraordinarily fine poet, with a far reach into the seen and unseen life of his country, and beyond it," she'd written. "And that cannot be lost."

Few poets captured the seen and unseen life like Eavan Boland, especially when describing the challenges of being a woman living in Ireland. While the nation is finally witnessing its women writers stepping into the literary spotlight there is still a good way to go, but when Eavan Boland emerged it was into a literary landscape dominated entirely by men.

From Yeats to Joyce to Synge to Behan, it was as if the entire Irish literary canon came from only one half of the population.

With Edna O'Brien, Maeve Brennan and a handful of others, Boland fought hard to be heard, facing obstacles far greater than those of her male counterparts. The current flowering of Irish women writers is due in no small part to Eavan Boland.

"I began to write in an Ireland where the word 'woman' and the word 'poet' seemed to be in some sort of magnetic opposition to each other," she said. "I wanted to put the life I lived into the poems I wrote. And the life I lived was a woman's life. And I couldn't accept the possibility that the life of the woman would not, or could not, be named in the poetry of my own nation."

She became a voice both of the oppressed ordinary Irish woman whose expectations from life were designed to go no further than marriage and motherhood, and of Ireland itself. Her verse was infused with landscape and history.

As the president of Ireland Michael D. Higgins, a published poet himself, said in a lengthy and heartfelt statement: "Over the years, through her poetry, critical work and teaching she displayed an extraordinary ability to invoke Irish landscapes, myth and everyday experience."

The everyday experience lived by the Irish woman was something she recognised as entirely absent from the literary canon.

From the young mother in a Dublin suburb to the grandmother on a remote island, women had worries and concerns they might not even have realised they shared and nobody to speak for them.

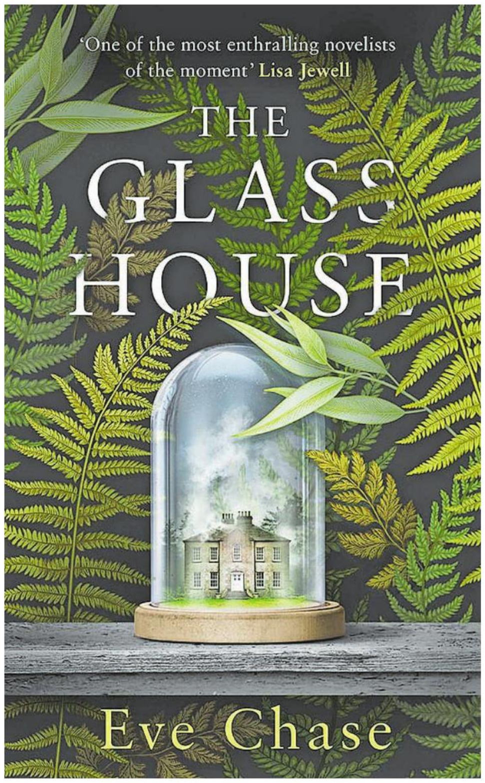
It was, as Boland said of her early years, "easier to have a political murder as the subject of an Irish poem than a baby or a washing machine".

She was at her best when righting this discrepancy. In *The Achill Woman*, for example, she describes an encounter as a student visiting Achill island off the Atlantic coast of Mayo when she met an elderly woman carrying a pail of water up a hill.

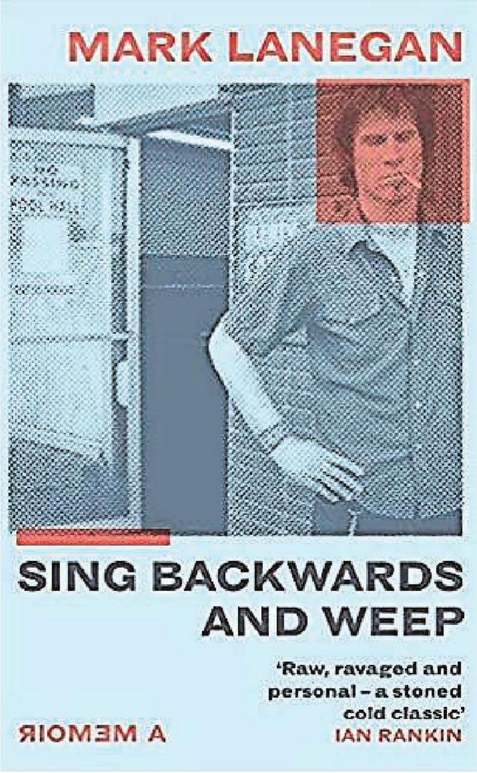
The zinc music of the handle on the rim

> "She became a voice both of the oppressed ordinary Irish woman whose expectations from life were designed to go no further than marriage and motherhood, and of Ireland itself.

FIVE GREAT BOOKS OUT THIS WEEK



'One of the most enthralling novelists of the moment' Lisa Jewell
THE GLASS HOUSE
Eve Chase



THE GLASS HOUSE

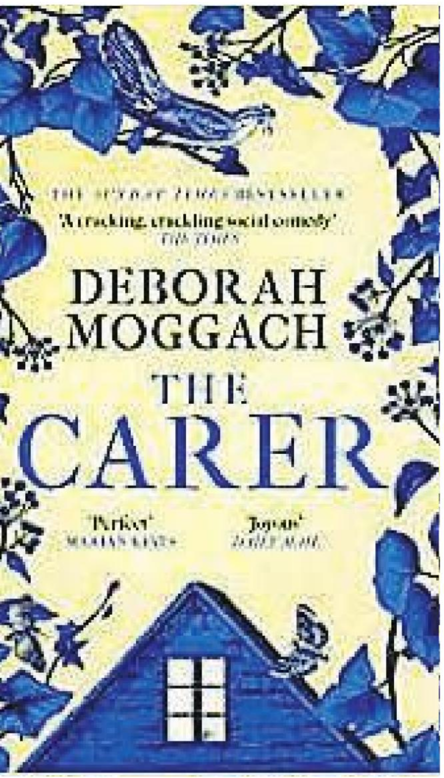
Eve Chase (Michael Joseph, £14.99)

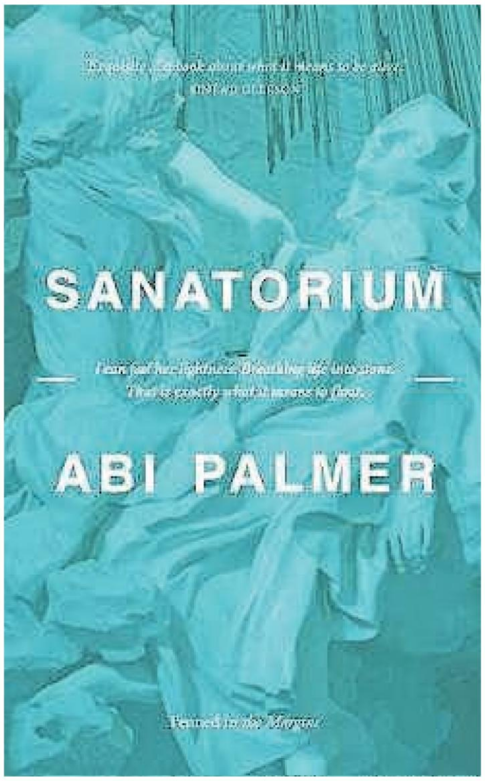
This is a haunting dual-narrative of family secrets and lies emanating from the discovery of a baby girl in a wood close to a remote manor house. The Harrington family who live there are reeling from a tragedy and the arrival of this apparent gift brings them new hope. They take in the child, keeping her a secret, triggering a chain of events more shattering than they could have imagined.

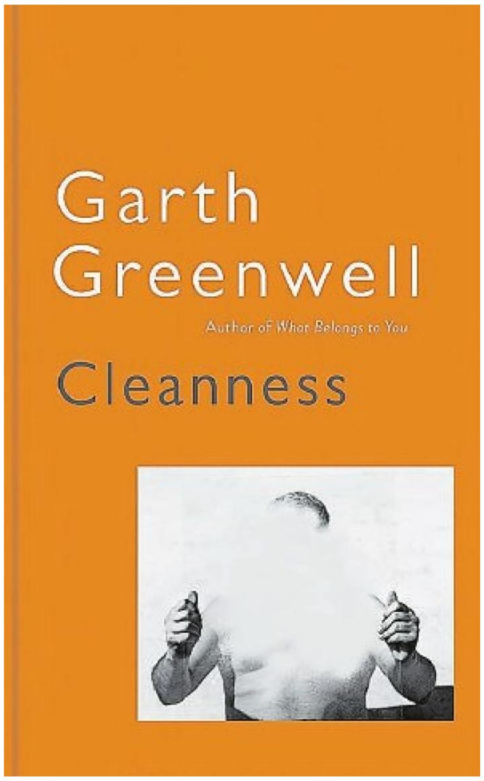
SING BACKWARDS AND WEEP

Mark Lanegan (White Rabbit, £20)

When Lanegan first arrived in Seattle in the mid-1980s he was a self-described "arrogant, self-loathing redneck waster seeking transformation through rock'n'roll". Over the next 10 years Lanegan would find fame fronting the Screaming Trees then descend into a world of crack dealing and heroin as some of his closest friends made it to the top. A visceral, unforgettable memoir.


THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER
'A cracking, crackling social comedy'
THE TIMES
DEBORAH MOGGACH
THE CARER
'Perfect'
MARIAN KEYES
'Joyous'





THE CARER
Deborah Moggach (Tinder, £8.99)
Out in paperback this week from the author of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* and *Tulip Fever*, *The Carer* is centred around Mandy, taken on by siblings Robert and Phoebe as a live-in carer for their elderly father James. All seems well until events transpire that throw everything into new relief, changing Phoebe and Robert's perception of their childhoods and the father they thought they knew.

SANATORIUM
Abi Palmer (Penned In The Margins, £9.99)
Returning to London from a thermal rehabilitation centre in Budapest a young woman sets out to continue her treatment in an inflatable blue bath that becomes a trip hazard in the middle of the room, slowly deflating and in constant danger of falling apart. Through this image Palmer's book mingles memoir, poetry and meditations on the body to create a mesmerising debut.

CLEANNESS
Garth Greenwell (Pan Macmillan, £14.99)
An American teacher arrives in a Sofia, Bulgaria, thrumming with impending upheaval. In an atmosphere of protest and disquiet, the teacher recalls a string of encounters from his years abroad that bring uncanny reminders of his past. A thought-provoking work about the connections we make geographically, romantically and within ourselves.

Tuned the evening. An Easter moon rose.
In the next door field a stream was
A fluid sunset; and then, stars.

She goes on to describe how her youth had her failing to comprehend "the harmonies of servitude, the grace music gives to flattery and language borrows from ambition".

Boland was born into the political and cultural elite but of a particular kind. Her father Frederick Boland was one of the nation's greatest diplomats, a man who was president of the United Nations assembly in 1960 and because of whom the young Eavan had a peripatetic childhood spent mostly in the UK and the United States.

Her mother Frances Kelly was a gifted painter, a woman whose successful artistic career – she'd studied in Paris and exhibited in Dublin – was curtailed by the duties of a diplomatic spouse.

Boland wrote movingly of her childhood, perhaps most notably in *An Irish Childhood in England: 1951* in which she evokes the rootlessness of being in a land strangely familiar yet still foreign.

Exile. Ration book pudding.
Bowls of dripping and the fixed smile
Of the school pianist playing 'Iolanthe',
'Land of Hope and Glory' and 'John Peel'.

The poem finishes on a withering cadence of displacement, describing how her teacher in the London convent school "when I produced 'I amn't' in the classroom/ turned and said, 'you're not in Ireland now'".

Having known no other life than the outsider she was well-equipped for a male-dominated literary canon into which she would only be accepted later in life.

"We have a powerful tradition here of the male poet," she said in 1998. "Irish poetry was male and bardic in ethos. Historically the woman is the passive object of poetry. We aren't supposed to write poems, we are supposed to be in them."

Boland set about changing all that. Her first poem was published when she was 17, her first collection at 22. Throughout her life she explored issues particularly pertinent to women: domestic violence, eating disorders, menstruation and the menopause.

Her willingness to evoke topics taboo in Catholic, patriarchal Ireland led to some bookshops refusing to stock her work as recently as the 1980s.

She remained undeterred, recording a woman's lifetime of experience and sending out messages of hope to women everywhere that reassured them they were not alone, not even in the stillness of melancholy introspection:

A child
shifts in a cot.
No matter what happens now
I'll never fill one again.

In that final published poem in the *New Yorker* she wrote of discovering an early 20th century newspaper account of her grandmother's eviction. The heat of an injustice still burning more than 100 years later fizzes from the page:

A woman leaves a courtroom in tears.
A nation is rising to the light.
History notes the second, not the first.
Nor does it know the answer as to why
on a winter evening
in a modern Ireland
I linger over the page of the Drogheda
Argus and Leinster Journal, 1904,
knowing as I do that my attention has
no agency, none at all. Nor my rage.

From her early days as a fighting female voice all but drowned out by men Eavan Boland rose quite a distance. In 1990 when Mary Robinson became the first woman president in the history of the Irish state she quoted Boland in her inaugural address when citing her desire to see Irish women "finding a voice where they found a vision".

Two years ago she stood at the lectern of the United Nations to read excerpts from *Our Future Will Become the Past of Other Women*, a poem written to commemorate the centenary of Irish women achieving suffrage.

Freedom is not abstract, is not a concept,
Is not an ethic only nor a precept.
It can also be a hope raised then defeated
Then renewed. It can be a voice braided
Into the silences of other women
Who came before.

America became as much of a home as Ireland. Boland spent the last 24 years of her life in a similarly transatlantic existence to her childhood, beginning her tenure at Stanford in 1996 and dividing her time between there and Dublin. Teaching gave her the time to write while also mentoring and guiding students, the ones who would come after her. She was still hosting tutorial seminars online in the last days of her life and thrived on her interaction with the ranks of students who passed through her classes every year.

Not for her the staid picking apart of techniques and deconstructions of theme and motive, at least, not completely. Instead she wanted students to appreciate and retain a love for words and literature, to recognise its potential to force change and define a life.

"When I teach, there are always books I recommend to students," she wrote in the *Irish Times* shortly before her death. "My chief category, however, is just this: books I wish I'd read when I was younger. I don't think I knew when I was a student that books don't just engage you. They change you. Long after the book is closed you take those changes with you into your life, where they continue to instruct it. They alter what you know and add to it. You may well read the book later. But those mysterious changes you never get back. I wish I'd understood that sooner."

Her poetry will endure, preserved as much for its beauty as for the trailblazing path she helped to forge for the generations of Irish women writing today and yet to come.

"In my time women went from being the objects of the Irish poem to being the authors of the Irish poem," she told an American newspaper in 1997, "and that was very disruptive in a literature that probably wasn't prepared for that."

In her 2001 poem *Is It Still The Same*, Boland addressed the figure of her younger self, hunched over a table by a window, snatching a few moments from the domestic routine to write a few lines. The poem's conclusion makes an appropriate epitaph for one of the most important women in modern European poetry.

I wrote like that once.
But this is different.
This time, when she looks up,
I will be there.

EUROFILE POEM AND PUZZLES

a poem for europe

LISA KELLY's first collection, *A Map Towards Fluency*, was published by Carcanet in 2019. Her pamphlets are *Philip Levine's Good Ear* (Stonewood Press) and *Bloodhound* (Hearing Eye).

ETIQUETTE FOR ZOONOTIC TIMES

I wish the rule was:/ speak only verse, sign-language,/ or a foreign tongue/ stipulated in advance/ on the RSVP card- from 'Reception' by John Weston

The diplomats have devised new rules:
we must speak only verse, sign language, or a foreign tongue.

Iron fists in velvet gloves twirl cocktail glasses of molecules
mixed by a bartender with compromised lungs.

The masquerade ball is exclusive – if somewhat cruel
to those who must lip read. There is a new sign among

us with no voice – a fist crowned by spiky fingers. New schools
of thought: twenty seconds of God Save the Queen sung

while soaping; The National Anthem another antiviral tool.
We learn the lingo: superspreaders, R naught. Old versus young;

male versus female; rich versus poor; how our gene pool
might dictate what we write on the RSVP card – soon to be flung.

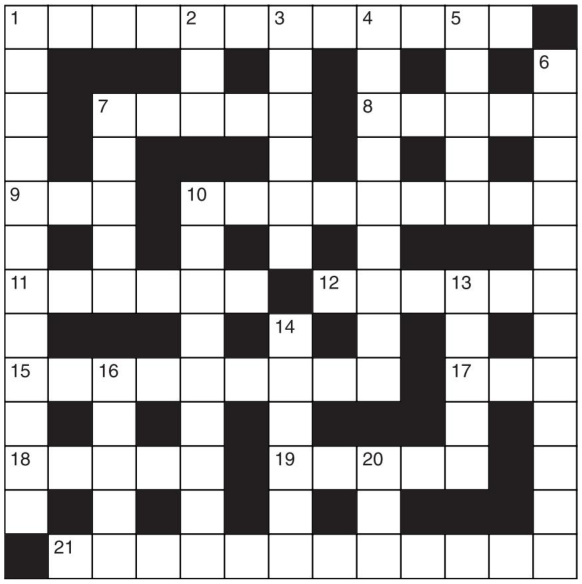
A poem for Europe is edited by Briony Bax, Poetry Editor. Submit your poems to poetryeditor@theneweuropean.co.uk

Cryptic crosswords sponsored by DORMONT ESTATE LIVING IN BALANCE WITH THE ENVIRONMENT **www.dormontestate.com**

Cryptic 1

Across
1. The extent of the telegram showing nautical measure (6,6)
7. Dear Raymond, you'll find the costume enclosed (5)
8. Duties; makes cuts after the end of August (5)
9. See 2 Down.
10. The amount of room to spare for the disposal of surplus goods (9)
11. Do some hoisting and apply the brakes (4,2)
12. It's frequently used by domestic brewers (6)
15. Apt by rule to change in an honourable way (9)
17 Across & 20 Down. A long time after Dorothy shows a second childhood (6)
18. Nothing at the end of grim Iberian river (5)
19. Get rid of the first letter in Irish (5)
21. They work with material, joints and locks (12)

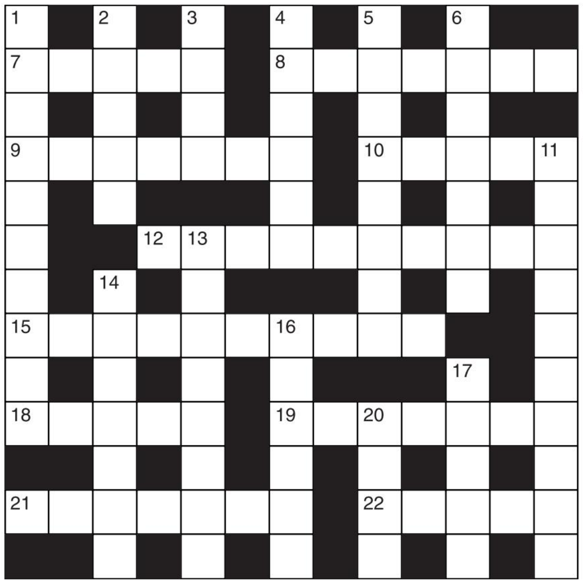
Down
1. A military turnout for one of the services (6,6)
2 Down & 9 Across. Cover for a sound receiver (3,3)
3. Namely different people who have not taken orders (6)
4. One I try to reform from ill–fame (9)
5. Ptomaine could come from beef producer in can (5)
6. It's not to use a different order to be showy (12)
7. A shroud, we hear, to cause dismay (5)
10. Hearing place will provide space for a game of tennis! (9)
13. This can be used for writing about father in church (5)
14. Sailor told to go away (6)
16. Fruit to cut with discrimination (5)
20. See 17 Across.



Cryptic 2

Across
7. Did nothing – I had been winning (5)
8. Some henchman or manservant from France (7)
9. Hide in part of Mediterranean island (7)
10. Distressed madwoman now lacking mistress (5)
12. Pirate didn't have to pay for footwear (10)
15. Amazed because weight carried by one hut (10)
18. Presumably the boss expects to lean on them (5)
19. Agree the Tory should be made to go (7)
21. Business anxiety (7)
22. Once more a profit is shown (5)

Down
1. The best pupils making their debut? (5,5)
2. Fuel used when things are not tight? (5)
3. Close row of bushes trimmed in the border (4)
4. Where to stick? (6)
5. Prudish girl gets flower (8)
6. Charge for male having engagement (7)
11. Version of Shakespearian character given by Yank on tram (4,6)
13. Tearless? (4–4)
14. Obviously not music produced without effort (7)
16. The runner-up by a very short time (6)
17. Where to get a different plane (5)
20. Get close to some fine artist (4)



AMBIT

Poet or Writer?

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Crossword solutions

Cryptic 1
Across: 1 Cable's length; 7 Array; 8 Taxes; 9 Cap; 10 Clearance; 11 Pull up; 12 Teapot; 15 Reputably; 17 Dot; 18 Douro; 19 Erase; 21 Seamstresses. **Down:** 1 Church parade; 2 Ear; 3 Laymen; 4 Notoriety; 5 Toxin; 6 Ostentatious; 7 Appal; 10 Courtroom; 13 Padre; 14 Absent; 16 Prune; 20 Age.

Cryptic 2
Across: 7 Idled; 8 Normans; 9 Secrete; 10 Madam; 12 Freebooter; 15 Astonished; 18 Staff; 19 Consent; 21 Concern; 22 Again. **Down:** 1 First class; 2 Slack; 3 Edge; 4 Inhere; 5 Primrose 6 Mandate; 11 Mark Antony; 13 Rent-free; 14 Strains; 16 Second; 17 Nepal; 20 Near.

Sudoku solutions

Medium 1

5	1	2	6	3	9	7	8	4
4	8	9	2	7	5	3	1	6
6	7	3	1	4	8	9	5	2
1	6	8	9	2	7	4	3	5
7	9	5	4	1	3	2	6	8
2	3	4	5	8	6	1	7	9
9	5	7	3	6	4	8	2	1
8	2	6	7	9	1	5	4	3
3	4	1	8	5	2	6	9	7

Medium 2

1	5	6	3	4	8	7	2	9
2	8	3	5	9	7	6	4	1
7	9	4	2	6	1	3	5	8
9	6	7	1	8	4	5	3	2
8	3	2	7	5	9	1	6	4
4	1	5	6	3	2	8	9	7
5	7	9	8	2	6	4	1	3
6	2	8	4	1	3	9	7	5
3	4	1	9	7	5	2	8	6

Hard 1

9	6	7	4	1	8	5	2	3
3	4	8	7	2	5	9	1	6
1	5	2	3	9	6	4	7	8
5	3	1	6	8	2	7	4	9
7	8	9	5	4	1	6	3	2
6	2	4	9	3	7	1	8	5
2	7	3	1	5	9	8	6	4
8	1	5	2	6	4	3	9	7
4	9	6	8	7	3	2	5	1

Hard 2

4	8	1	6	9	2	5	3	7
7	5	9	1	4	3	8	6	2
2	3	6	7	8	5	1	4	9
9	2	8	3	5	4	7	1	6
5	1	3	8	7	6	9	2	4
6	7	4	2	1	9	3	8	5
1	6	2	5	3	7	4	9	8
8	4	7	9	2	1	6	5	3
3	9	5	4	6	8	2	7	1

Numberfit solutions

1

■	■	9	4	2	5	7	6	■
■	2	4	3	8	3	■	2	7
1	2	■	4	7	3	1	3	9
3	7	1	■	2	■	4	2	5
2	6	5	2	■	2	4	3	2
3	7	7	■	2	■	7	5	3
4	2	1	2	1	4	■	1	9
1	4	■	2	9	3	4	3	■
■	1	8	6	2	6	1	■	■

2

■	7	8	1	9	5	8	2	■
3	■	2	5	■	4	8	■	3
3	5	6	■	■	■	4	6	2
2	6	6	9	■	5	9	7	9
6	2	8	3	0	7	4	9	2
9	0	3	5	■	3	8	7	6
4	7	7	■	■	■	3	3	9
4	■	4	3	■	2	7	■	9
■	5	5	6	7	8	2	1	■

Sudoku – medium 1

	1			3		7		4
4	8	9						
	7		1	4				2
		8	9		7			
7		5				2		8
			5		6	1		
9				6	4		2	
						5	4	3
3		1		5			9	

Sudoku – medium 2

	5		3	4	8		2	
2				9				1
		4				3		
9			1		4			2
8	3						6	4
4			6		2			7
		9				4		
6				1				5
	4		9	7	5		8	

Sudoku – hard 1

9		7		1		5		
			7	2				
1						4		8
	3				2			
7	8						3	2
			9				8	
2		3						4
				6	4			
		6		7		2		1

Sudoku – hard 2

4						5		7
				4	3			
		6	7					9
		8		5			1	
	1		8		6		2	
	7			1		3		
1					7	4		
			9	2				
3		5						1

Numberfit

Fit the listed numbers into each grid.

■	■							■
■						■		
		■						
			■		■			
				■				
			■		■			
						■		
		■						■
■							■	■

■								■
	■			■			■	
			■	■	■			
				■				
				■				
			■	■	■			
	■			■			■	
■								■

Numberfit 1

2 digits: 12 – 14 – 19 – 27 – 41 – 94
3 digits: 226 – 371 – 377 – 425 – 434 – 436 – 533 – 753
4 digits: 1447 – 1571 – 2192 – 2432 – 2652 – 2872
5 digits: 24383 – 29343
6 digits: 132341 – 186261 – 421214 – 473139 – 795239 – 942576
8 digits: 22767241 – 62323513

Numberfit 2

2 digits: 15 – 25 – 27 – 28 – 36 – 43 – 48 – 54
3 digits: 339 – 356 – 462 – 477 – 573 – 935
4 digits: 2669 – 3876 – 5979 – 9035
5 digits: 56207 – 67973
7 digits: 3292699 – 3326944 – 5567821 – 7819582
9 digits: 628307492 – 826683745 – 884948372

NONE FOR THE WISER

There is a word sometimes used by pedants to catch people out. We should have none of it, says **PETER TRUDGILL**

There are certain people in the English-speaking world who would like to prescribe how others should speak. Many of these pedants think it is 'wrong' to say *None of them are very interesting*, and want us to use the singular verb *is* instead of the plural verb *are*: *None of them is very interesting*.

This is rather unfortunate, because nearly all native English speakers very frequently use *none* as a plural. It is entirely natural for mother-tongue speakers of English to respond to a question such as *Are any of them coming?* by replying *No, none of them are* – and this is a perfectly grammatical usage.

But the arguments which the prescriptivists use to back up their feeling that this is 'bad grammar' are interesting in themselves. Some people like this reckon, for example, that *none* should always be singular, not plural, because "*none* is short for *not one*".

As it happens, none of them are right about that! In the earliest of all early Old English texts, our modern word *none* appears as *nan*. It was a word that was common to all the ancient Germanic languages, appearing in Old Frisian as *nan*, Old Icelandic as neinn, Old Saxon as *nan*, and Old High German as *nein*.

It is true that those forms themselves did come from an even more ancient Proto-Germanic form *ne ainaz*, where *ne* was a negative marker and *ainaz* was the numeral 'one'. But that early language was spoken in southern Scandinavia about 2,500 years ago, so it would not be easy to construct a persuasive argument about the correctness of different modern English usages on the basis of what Proto-Germanic speakers said.

Another argument which prescriptivists have employed in favour of their argument that *none* should always be singular is based on an ingenious kind of pseudo-arithmetical reasoning. It goes like this: *none* refers to zero; zero is less than one; *none* therefore cannot refer to more than one; so *none* cannot possibly be plural; and so it must be singular.

But the issue here is not a matter of mathematics but of grammar. Everybody will agree that sometimes *none* has to be singular, as in *none of this beer is any good*, or *none of that bread was very fresh*. No one would ever say *none of this cheese are any good*.

So what we can see at work here, then, is a rule of English grammar which all of us use automatically, without thinking about it: *beer*, *bread* and *cheese* in these sentences are singular, and so the negative word *none* agrees with them in being singular too. On the other hand, in cases where *none* is negating something which is plural, then in everyday English grammar it will also be plural regardless of any spurious mathematical arguments: *none of those cheeses are any good*.

A number of the other languages in the Germanic family agree with English about this. Corresponding to English *None of them are interesting*, many Dutch speakers would say *Geen van hen zijn interessant*, where *geen* is 'none' and *zijn* is plural 'are'. In the Norwegian sentence *Ingen av dem er veldig snille*, 'None of them are very nice', *ingen* means 'none' and, while *er* could translate as either 'is' or 'are', we can still tell that *ingen* is not being treated as a singular because the adjective *snille*, 'nice', has the *-e* ending which is a sign of the plural.

The people who compiled the *Oxford English Dictionary* understand all this. The *OED* says "it is sometimes held that *none* can only take a singular verb, never a plural verb: *none of them is coming tonight* rather than *none of them are coming tonight*. There is little justification, historical or grammatical, for this view. *None* has been used for around a thousand years with both a singular and a plural verb."

SAY CHEESE: *The Ricotta Eaters* by Italian artist Vincenzo Campi (c. 1585)

Photo: Getty Images

TO SCRIBE

We have a number of fairly frequently used verbs in English like *prescribe*, *circumscribe*, *ascribe*, *inscribe*, *describe*, *proscribe*, *subscribe*, and *transcribe*, which all come from Latin *scribere*, 'to write', with an added prefix. *Circumscribe* literally means 'write around'. Interestingly, though, the verb *to scribe* itself is very rarely used in modern English.

SHELL
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DANGEROUS GAME: Alfonso De Portago, centre, talks to British driver Peter Collins, right, before the start of the 1957 Mille Miglia. De Portago was killed in the closing stages of the race. Collins would die in a crash during the 1958 German Grand Prix

Photo: Getty Images

GREAT EUROPEAN LIVES

BY CHARLIE CONNELLY

#146

ALFONSO DE PORTAGO

OCTOBER 11, 1928 – MAY 12, 1957

Piero Taruffi was delighted. At 50 he thought his chance of ever winning the Mille Miglia had gone but his Ferrari had crossed the line ahead of everyone that sunny spring afternoon at Brescia in 1957. After 1,000 gruelling miles he was oil-spattered and panda-eyed without his goggles, but grinned from behind the huge spray of flowers thrust at him as he climbed out of his Ferrari.

The German Count Wolfgang von Trips finished a close second with Belgium's Olivier Gendebien making it a triple for Ferrari in third place. The drivers and the packed stands looked back down the road expecting to see a fourth Ferrari roaring towards them any moment. Alfonso de Portago wasn't far behind, at least, not last they heard: the telephone line connecting to points further down the course had stopped working.

The 28-year-old Marquis de Portago had been building quite a reputation in the four years since he'd taken up motor racing. He'd won the automobile version of the Tour de France, and the Nassau Governor's Cup in the Bahamas two years running. He'd made it onto the Grand Prix circuit in 1956, finishing second behind the great Fangio in the British Grand Prix at Silverstone where the previous year he'd suffered a broken leg in a 140mph crash during practice for the International Trophy.

It was this incident he had in mind when a few days before the Mille Miglia he'd told an interviewer, "I think what frightens me most is that when I have actually lost control of the car there is absolutely nothing I can do except sit still, frozen with fear, and wait for events to take their natural course".

Fear, he felt, was a healthy emotion, it livened the senses, made you more alert, maybe even made you a better driver.

"I like the feeling of fear. After a while you become an addict and have to have more of it," he said. Yet at the same time he thrummed with the invincibility of youth.

"Don't worry, I will not die in an accident," he'd reassured a friend expressing concern at the dangers of motor racing. "I will die either of old age or be executed as the result of a gross miscarriage of justice."

Alfonso Antonio Vicente Bias Angel Francisco Borjia Cabeza de Vaca y Leighton, Grandee of Spain, Count of Mejorada, Count of Pemia, Marquis de Moratalla, Marquis de Portago and Duke of Alagon, was a classic European aristocratic adventurer. His father Antonio Cabeza de Vaca was a celebrated golfer, gambler, millionaire and *bon viveur* who died at 45 while playing polo and who hailed from a long and noble Spanish line. De Vacas had led armies into battle since the 13th century and they were among the early Spanish explorer-conquerors that sailed for the farthest-flung corners of the earth. Alfonso wore this ancestry almost visibly: friends would joke he was born 400 years too late.

"Every time I look at Fon," one said, "I see him in a long black cape, a sword sticking out of it, a floppy black hat on his head, riding like a fiend across some castle drawbridge."

Rich, handsome, connected – King Alfonso XIII was his godfather – and with an innate antipathy to boredom, de Portago saw motor racing as an extension of this ancestral lineage. With no more lands to conquer, the laurels and adrenaline of the racetrack would more than suffice.

"It is the uncertainty of the future that attracts the adventurer most," he said. "Few professions have less security and more uncertainty about the future than motor racing. One can be on top one second but all it requires is a tiny error to be embarrassingly dead the next."

The last stretch of the Mille Miglia was a relief for its drivers. Having negotiated the twists and turns of the road through the Apennines the road to the finish line lay long and straight through the Po Valley. As the flat Lombardian landscape spread before him Di Portago glanced at his navigator, smiled, and pressed the accelerator.

He'd met Ed Nelson in 1945 when the American had just left the merchant marine and taken a job at the plush Manhattan hotel where de Portago was living at the time. There might have been a decade of difference in their ages but the pair soon became friends, united by a love of dangerous adventure. Nelson, a decent light-heavyweight in his day, taught de Portago to box and one winter in Switzerland introduced him to bobsledding at the Cresta Run. The Spaniard took to it with the same combination of skill, bravery and recklessness that characterised everything he did. Nelson would tell of how on his first ever run de Portago was 15 seconds faster than the Swiss champion practising on the same day.

"I know Fon says he'll live forever," Nelson would smile, "but I say he won't live to be 30."

Three months before the Mille Miglia, de Portago had led a Spanish four-man bobsled team at the 1956 Winter Olympics in Italy, missing out on bronze by a fraction of a second.

He'd sought the thrill of adrenaline from an early age, learning to pilot a plane at 17, immediately winning a $500 bet by flying it under a bridge, and riding in two Grand Nationals at Aintree, falling at the eighth on Garde Toi in 1950 and almost making it round on Icy Calm two years later. He was the French amateur champion jockey three years in a row, played the Franco-Spanish wall game of jai alai to a high standard, was a champion swimmer, a competitive tennis player and still found time to excel at polo, yachting and shooting. It was motor racing that would take the firmest grip on the young Spaniard, however.

"A bob run lasts only a minute and 23 seconds," he'd said at the Olympics. "An auto-race can last 24 hours. In addition, one likes to think one controls a car 99% of the time but one isn't in control of a bob, you merely help it on its way."

The Mille Miglia, which ran from Brescia to Rome and back, presented de Portago with many hours at the wheel. That his old friend Nelson was in the passenger seat, where he'd been during the previous year's Tour de France win, only made things better. They couldn't win this time but that didn't mean they shouldn't push the bright red Ferrari 335S to its limits. In addition, the sooner he finished, the sooner he could be reunited with his girlfriend, actress Linda Christian, with whom he'd earlier riled officials at a Rome checkpoint by insisting on a lengthy embrace before he drove off.

They were on a straight road, 30 miles from Brescia. The sun was shining and de Portago could feel the wind on his face, roaring above the raspy whine of the engine. These were the moments he lived for, that gave his life of unbridled privilege depth, a sense of meaning and personal achievement separate from his inherited titles, something he could call his own.

"It is wonderful to be alive," he'd written in his diary the previous night, "especially knowing that I might die tomorrow."

They shot through the village of Cerlongo with the way ahead arrow-straight to the horizon. He pressed the accelerator and watched the speed needle quiver towards 150mph. The crowds lining the road were a blur.

At the finish line the minutes ticked by but there was no sign of de Portago. Nearly half an hour had passed since Gendebien's third place finish and when a car did finally appear in the distance it was the Maserati of Giorgio Scarlatti. He climbed out of his cockpit looking pale, talking about bodies at the roadside, a telegraph pole snapped off at the base, wires, debris and oil on the road, the screaming and wailing audible even above the sound of his engine.

Just outside the village of Guidizzolo a front tyre on de Portago's Ferrari had burst. The car skidded out of control, smashed into a telegraph pole, shot 15ft into the air and careered into the crowd first on one side of the road, then the other. What was left of the vehicle finished in a brook some distance from the impact site.

De Portago and Nelson were killed instantly. Ten spectators also lay dead, five of them children including two sets of siblings. It was an accident so dreadful it ensured the Mille Miglia would never be run again.

"I'm sure I love life more than the average man does," de Portago had told an interviewer a few months before his death. "I want to live to be 105, and I mean to. I want to live to be a very old man. I'm enchanted by life. But no matter how long I live I still won't have time for all the things I want to do."

WILL SELF

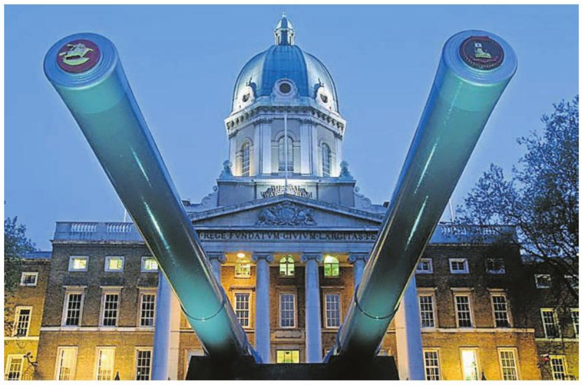
Multicultural Man .. on corona dreams

On my night time promenades through south London I often find myself in the purlieu of the Imperial War Museum, close to Waterloo Station. Some might surmise from the pair of 15-inch naval guns set in front of this gaunt, neoclassical edifice that it was purpose-built to house a collection of superannuated death-metal – but the truth is yet more disturbing. In fact, between 1815 and 1930 it was psychiatric patients who were corralled beneath its etiolated copper-sheathed dome, for this was the site of the Bethlem Royal Hospital, aka ‘Bedlam’. A peripatetic institution, originally located near Bishopsgate in the City, over the centuries it’s schlepped to Moorgate, then south of Waterloo – and finally to the deepest south: a green-field site near West Wickham.

The Imperial War Museum still feels a little crazy, what with its vast guns levelled on the pub opposite – and its surrounding gardens, which, up until the pandemic struck, were frequented by many rough sleepers. But in the 1840s, when an insomniac Charles Dickens patrolled these streets, it must have seemed considerably more disturbing – sufficient, at any rate, to engender in the writer this strange epiphany: “Are not the sane and the insane equal at night as the sane lie a dreaming? Are not all of us outside this hospital who dream; more or less in the condition of those inside it, every night of our lives? Are we not nightly persuaded, as they daily are, that we associate preposterously with kings and queens, emperors and empresses, and notabilities of all sorts? Do we not nightly jumble events and personages and times and places, as these do daily?”

I can’t be alone in having experienced a fillip to my dream life these past few weeks – and as Dickens rightly observed, the realms of the oneiric and the psychotic share a highly porous border. When I was young there used to be regular surveys of the British that revealed a majority of the male population had had sex with the Queen while they slept – a preposterous association indeed. The population may now be both ageing and increasingly gerontophiliac, but I’d wager that in common with me, both sexes have been experiencing yet more apocalyptic visions recently than Elizabeth Windsor shimmying out of a cerise tent-dress by Norman Hartnell.

That lover of littler girls, Vladimir Nabokov, said: “Recount a dream – lose a reader,” but surely this depends – at least in part – on the dream? A few nights ago, I found myself standing at my bedroom window in bright evening sunlight, aware simultaneously that I was dreaming, and that my four children and my partner were with me, all of us staring fixedly at the coruscating disc. As we watched, the sun split down the middle vertically, and the left-hand side plummeted into the ocean that had mysteriously covered the Brixton area. All at once a huge steamy cloud, reeking of ozone, boiled towards us. I sniffed it judiciously, and turning to the family said: “I’m afraid that’s it: the world’s come to an end…”



DISTURBING PAST: London’s Imperial War Museum at night

Photo: Getty Images

At least, that’s how the minatory vision appeared to me upon waking – but in truth, I don’t believe the dreamer dreams the dream at all; rather, I think the conscious mind assembles the dream narrative upon waking, desperate as it is to make sense of these crazy ideas and impressions: the cloven sun, the hissing sea, the matter-of-fact *Gotterdammerung*. Because let’s face it, Freudians, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar – while an apocalypse is definitely an apocalypse. We’ve all been awaking to the same double-take on reality for weeks now: one crusty eye un-gumming, we survey the duvet-padded cell of our reclusion, and remember – yet again – that the new normal is anything but.

In discussion with the family, I pondered not the meaning of my dream – which was blindingly obvious – but its surreally real mechanics: if the sun were to split in half, the half that fell into the sea would have to shrink massively – indeed the shrunken-half-sun would be proportionately as small in relation to the Earth as a single coronavirus virion is in relation to the human body. (If you don’t believe me – do the math!) But while this all seemed straightforward – further analysis returned me to the Freudian couch: “How did the dream make you feel?” My partner asked, in cod-psychotherapeutic tones. I reflected for a moment: the dream had certainly been terrifying, yet I’d awoken feeling a quiet sense of self-satisfaction. “And why was that?” My partner probed further.

“Well,” I conceded, “Freud believed all dreams were about wish-fulfilment – and as you know, I’ve been obsessed that the world was about to end due to the climate emergency for a year or more; so although the proximate cause may have been different, nonetheless, as I watched the half-sun plunge into the ocean, I experienced the tremendous pleasure known as I-told-you-so…”

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